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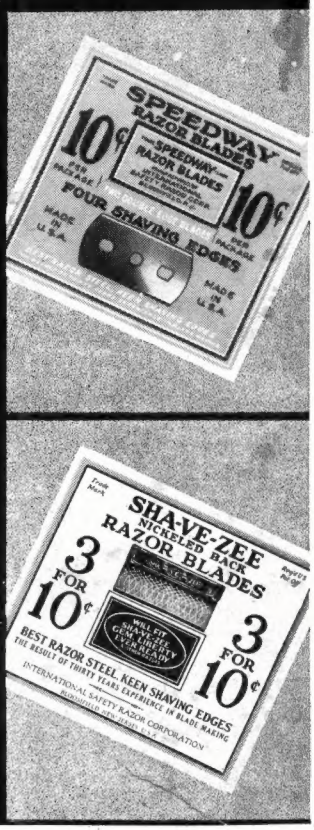

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The White Wolf

CHAPTER 1

THE BROTHERS DESCHAMPS

ALWAYS had the name of Deschamps been identified with the little Quebec village. In the civil records and in the records of the church, which go back for more than two hundred years, one may find the name of Deschamps. And in the little cemetery are to be seen the graves of many Deschamps. But few Deschamps have lived their lives in the village, for they are a wayfaring folk—outlanders at heart and outlanders in deed—voyageurs, traders, wanderers of the woods and the rivers. Many a Deschamps had been born in the village; and to the village many had returned to die. And thus it was that, after the tradition of his fathers, when old Pierre Deschamps found himself hopelessly crippled with rheumatism, he returned to the village to live upon the pension of the great fur company he had served for forty years.

This was as it should be. The old ones welcomed him and over their wine they listened to his tales of the outlands. But what set the old heads wagging was the fact that with him to the village came his two sons. An older son, Hyacinthe, was in a school in Montreal and in two years would be a priest. But the twins—the two who returned with their father! Was it, asked the old ones, that the breed of Deschamps was forsaking the outlands? Never before, at the age of twenty, had any Deschamps remained in the village, save only one, an uncle of Pierre, who had been a cripple from birth and had died many years ago.

But these two were not cripples. They were handsome, upstanding lads who set the hearts of the girls a-flutter. And so alike that to look upon them one could

A Novelette of the Canadian Outlands

By

JAMES B. HENDRYX

scarce tell the one from the other. But there the resemblance ceased.

Jean Baptiste was of serious mien and took no part in the carousals of the wilder youth of the village, as became one who had taken a position in the bank.

But François—there was the gay one! With a lurking devil in his eyes and a laugh on his lips, he was here, there and everywhere. No indoor job for him. He soon established himself as the best man upon the river. He laughed and sang and kissed the girls and drank his wine and spent his money like a prince. *Voilà!* It is so we live when we are young. When we are old—but that is a long time, yet—*eh bien, soit!*

The villagers loved François Deschamps—even the old ones, though they wagged their heads and said that he was born with the devil in him, the devil that was the heritage of one Deschamps in each generation. And they whispered among themselves of the doings of Henri Deschamps, who was the uncle of François. And of Jacques, who was the lad's grandfather. And did not old Papa Jaloux, who was more than one hundred years old, tell a story of the dark doings of a Deschamps who was an old man when he, Papa Jaloux, was but a boy? Also it was told that there had been a Deschamps hanged at Quebec by Roberval more than three hundred years ago. Had not Father Malhoit read it in an early writing of the Jesuits? Always, the old ones said, must there be one bad Deschamps.

It was whispered that Céleste Cardinal loved François—and Céleste the belle of the village. There were those who predicted that the banns would be published before the snow flew in the fall. Whereat, among the old ones, there was much wagging of heads and the shrugging of thick shoulders. Why could not Céleste marry

Jean Baptiste, who was known also to love her? Or even Louis Gagnon, who had money, though none knew where he had got it? So, even as they wagged and shrugged, they smiled upon François, with his merry jest for the old as well as for the young. They winked at his carousals and recounted his pranks with laughter.

But—murder—that is no prank! And the faces of the old ones were grave upon the morning following the dance of Antoine Gauthier.

CHAPTER II

AT THE DANCE OF ANTOINE GAUTHIER

THERE was much whispering at the dance of Antoine Gauthier when it became known that Céleste Cardinal had come with Jean Baptiste and not with François. There were those who predicted that François would not come at all—but they were wrong. For François did come, a bit flushed with wine, but even gayer and more merry than usual. Did he not dance, not once, but three times with old Madame Martel, who is ugly and fat and the mother of fourteen children? And he danced with the others, young and old, but not once did he dance with Céleste Cardinal. And between dances he went often to the kitchen where there was wine and whisky in abundance for the men.

Like François, Louis Gagnon, who was a third suitor for the hand of Céleste Cardinal, came alone to the dance. Of Louis Gagnon the old ones had little to say. He had come to the village since the great war, and it was whispered that he was rich. One does not get rich fighting for France in the war; but it is said that in running whisky into Halifax one may become very rich quickly. And Louis Gagnon looked like one who had become rich quickly. It was known that he added to his riches by lending money to those in need at a very high per cent. of interest. He was a smiling man, soft spoken and suave, having nothing of the serious manner of Jean Baptiste, nor yet of the boisterous good humor of François. He spoke little—and never of himself.

Louis Gagnon danced often with Céleste that night and, seeing how matters stood between the girl and François, he smiled. For it was François he feared as a rival, and not the somber Jean Baptiste. Him he already had in his power by reason of a note of hand, payable upon demand, which Jean Baptiste had given him when, a short time before, he had secretly borrowed two hundred dollars. One who works in the *banque* should not secretly borrow money, and Louis knew this when he willingly made the loan.

As the evening wore on François became louder and more boisterous in his fun and repaired more often to the kitchen, which between the dances became more and more crowded with men. It was there that Louis Gagnon inadvertently jostled François as he made his way to the table upon which were the jugs and the bottles and the glasses.

Now good natured jostling and crowding to and from the table had been the order of the evening, and indeed, it could not be otherwise, as the room was not large, and was crowded by many men who smoked and jested and laughed and drank their wine and their liquor. But only to the jostling of Louis Gagnon did François take offense.

"Ho, clumsy one!" he cried, in the hearing of all. "Take your elbow from my belly and your feet off mine. Come, let us go outside and see if you can lay your fist against me as easily as you do your elbow. I promise that you will wear raw beef upon your eyes for two whole days."

Louis Gagnon smiled.

"*Pardon, monsieur.* I meant no harm. It was because of the crowd. I do not desire to fight—"

"Ha! It is a poor dance without at least one fight. Come—we will make a fight."

"It is not my wish to fight with you. You are stronger than I. It would be no

honor to you if you should beat me. And if I should prevail it would be even less honor to me, for they would say, 'François was drunk or Louis could not have beaten him.' And they would be right. When you are sober, if you still desire to fight, I will try to accommodate you, although I know that you will prevail. But when you are sober you will forget this slight offense, for which I truly ask your pardon."

There was truth in the words, as even François perceived—and so the matter passed off without trouble, except that as Louis stepped from the room François revealed the true reason for his rancor.

"But, mind you," he called, "if you again dance with Céleste, I will kill you!"

Many laughed at this great jest, and François drank more wine.

A dance was under way and Louis Gagnon scowled as he watched Céleste glide about the floor in the arms of Jean Baptiste. That the man had heard the loud bawled threat of his brother Louis had no doubt, for he saw a smile flit across the thin lips as he passed close in the dance. Jean Baptiste smiled because he knew that in hurling his foolish threat François had sunk lower in the eyes of Céleste. But, misinterpreting the smile, Louis's scowl deepened.

"He would laugh at this foolish threat, would he?" he muttered to himself. "It is said that he who laughs last laughs best. There will be scant room for laughter in the heart of Jean Baptiste for the rest of this evening, and I myself would dance with Céleste." For no more than the others did he heed the threat of François, holding it to be but the foolish voice of the wine.

TEARING a page from a small notebook, he scribbled thereon a few words, and when Jean Baptiste conducted Céleste to her chair, he secretly slipped him the bit of writing and noted with satisfaction the perceptible paling of his face as he read it. For the writing was an immediate demand for the liquidation of the note of hand. The eyes of Jean Baptiste met Louis's in one swift, appealing glance and, beholding nothing of compassion nor of sympathy, he took from his pocket a pencil, wrote hastily upon the back of the paper and passed it back.

With the eyes of Jean Baptiste anxiously upon him, Louis read the penciled words and, removing from his pocket the note of hand, he affixed thereto, by means of a pin which he took from the edge of the lapel of his coat, the demand, upon the back of which Jean Baptiste had scribbled a definite promise to pay within three days. Folding the two papers, he carelessly thrust them into the pocket of his waistcoat and indicated by a nod that he would grant the required three days.

Jean Baptiste interpreted the nod and, as he turned heavily away, Louis Gagnon smiled thinly, as his glance rested for a moment upon the ring upon the finger of Céleste. Louis Gagnon knew where the two hundred dollars he had loaned to Jean Baptiste had gone. What interested him now was where Jean Baptiste would get the two hundred dollars to repay the loan within three days. Suppose he should take it from the bank! Louis Gagnon moistened his lips over the golden possibility of blackmail. Unobserved, he removed the folded papers from his waistcoat pocket and secreted them in a wallet from which he removed a perfectly blank note of hand, to which he pinned a perfectly blank page from his notebook. These he carelessly thrust into the pocket of his waistcoat. If Jean Baptiste should succeed in picking his pocket in the crowd he would get little for his pains. And Jean Baptiste might do just that; so thought Louis Gagnon.

With Céleste Cardinal, Louis Gagnon danced again—and yet again. And from a secluded corner of the room the eyes of Jean Baptiste smoldered and narrowed as they rested upon the two who guided lightly through the maze of the overcrowded floor.

Also, from the doorway of the kitchen, François watched. His eyes did not narrow and smolder as did the eyes of

Jean Baptiste, but his fists clenched. Louis Gagnon had disregarded his warning. The idle threat to kill had been mere words, but the warning had been in earnest, as Louis Gagnon would soon know—for, upon the lonely cart road that led to his lodging, he would very shortly receive the beating of his life.

CHAPTER III

ON THE CARTWAY

MOST of the guests had departed from the dance when François Deschamps followed Louis Gagnon through the deserted street on to the little used cartway that led past the home of the Widow Chartier, with whom Louis had taken lodging. As the man turned into the shaded byway François quickened his steps lest he lose sight of him under the dense foliage which, meeting overhead, all but obscured the dim light of the waning moon.

François was young and in the cool, clean air his head cleared quickly of the fumes of the liquor. The man was but a few steps ahead now, an obscure moving shadow in an alley of deep shade. François clenched his fists. He was about to call softly, when there was a sudden commotion—a blur of dim shadows. He halted barely three steps away. The figure before him staggered back with a half stifled cry as another figure bore upon him, struck, struck again, and yet again. And François stared in half comprehending horror as, with a throaty gurgle, Louis Gagnon sank to the ground, strained convulsively and lay still. The other figure stooped, and so close was François that he saw the man's fingers remove a bit of paper from the pocket of the stricken one's waistcoat. The next moment he hurtled upon the stooping figure with so great an impact that both rolled over and over upon the ground.

With a startled cry François leaped erect and stood staring down into the face of Jean Baptiste, who was slowly rising to his feet, a knife clutched tightly in his hand.

"Good God!" he cried, as the other stood facing him. "What have you done? You have killed him! It is murder! The police—they will hang you!"

An icy smile twisted the lips that framed words that came slowly and without a hint of tremor:

"Ah—no. They will not hang me, my dear brother. Consider. It was not I who challenged him to fight. Nor was it I who threatened to kill him if he danced again with Céleste."

For a long moment François stood staring into his brother's face, striving to grasp the import of the words.

"You mean—"

"I mean that if one of us must hang, it will not be I."

"But—I did not kill him!"

"Who will believe that? Especially after I have reluctantly told how I followed you, fearing you would carry out your threat—and arrived but a moment too late."

"Would you tell them that?" cried François, his eyes wide with horror.

"And why not? What else can I say? I have no wish to hang. But—why should either of us hang? There is yet time for you to escape. He will not be found for hours. Here is money—twenty dollars—all I have. Go. Avoid the highways. I have heard that New York is big—and Boston."

"Damn your money! And damn you! You think by this to get Céleste! But—"

The other interrupted.

"Yes. I have played my cards well. With Louis gone, and you—why not?"

For a moment it seemed that François would throw himself upon his brother, but a glance at the knife deterred him. In horror he stared at that bloody knife, his own.

"You are losing time," reminded Jean Baptiste.

"I have not killed!" cried François. "And never in my heart has been the thought to kill. But, by God, if you pursue Céleste, *I will kill!* No matter where I am I will know. I will return—and

when I do you will wish you had played the man—and been hanged! For *I will kill as the wolf kills!* 'Twill be no merciful snapping of the neck, mind you that! You dog! You are no brother of mine! I spit upon you!"

The next moment he was gone.

Alone in the gloom of the cartway Jean Baptiste stood looking down into the face of the dead man. Sudden panic seized him. He remembered François's wide eyed, startled face as he had exclaimed, "It is murder! The police—they will hang you!" Jean Baptiste knew something of the Mounted Police. Many times they had stopped at his father's post in the far outlands. It was said that they always got their man. Rapidly his brain raced back over the events of the evening.

No one could suspect him, Jean Baptiste. No one had seen him cross the street—after Céleste went into the house—and slip into his own house and take François's knife. And no one had seen him creep stealthily out of the house and hurry to this place. No! He was a fool to fear. Were there not many who heard François threaten to kill Louis Gagnon? And would not François's knife be found? And had François not fled? Who would believe François if he were caught—in the face of such evidence as this? No one—not the police, nor the judge, nor the jury—nor the people.

A slight breeze rustled the overhanging leaves and caused shadows to play lightly upon the dead man's upturned face. Jean Baptiste started nervously—it seemed that the body moved, that it had winked one glassy eye, and that the corners of its mouth had twisted into a mocking sneer. With a muttered imprecation, Jean Baptiste stooped and, plunging the knife into the chest of the corpse, left it sticking there. Then, very deliberately, he wiped the blood from his hands upon a handkerchief which he carelessly tossed aside. As he walked toward the street he took from his pocket the folded memorandum and note of hand which he had removed from the waistcoat of the dead man and, tearing them into tiny bits, tossed them to the wind, which whirled them into a weed patch. Then he went home and threw himself, fully dressed, upon the bed.

CHAPTER IV

CORPORAL DOWNEY INVESTIGATES

CORPORAL DOWNEY, R. C. M. P, arrived in response to a telephone call after a three-hour automobile trip from detachment headquarters. As the police car glided to a standstill, the crowd which had collected about the mouth of the cartway surged toward it, young and old staring with curiosity at the grizzled officer who stepped from the seat closely followed by the driver, a younger man, also wearing the uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

With a word of greeting, the village priest stepped forward.

"Will you follow?" he asked and, when Downey nodded, turned and led the way into the lane where little knots of oldsters drew aside in respectful silence as the three passed to where the body lay as it had fallen, the knife buried to the hilt in the chest. "We have allowed no one to touch him," said the priest, "although many of the curious have passed by to look. Never before, even in the memory of the oldest man, has there been a murder among us."

"You figure it's a murder, eh?" asked Downey, his eyes on the corpse.

"What else?" asked the priest in surprise. "You can see that the knife has been plunged many times into his chest. Surely, one could not thus stab himself."

Downey smiled.

"No. I wasn't thinkin' of suicide. But every killin' ain't a murder, as the law sees it—self-defense, for instance. Did you know this man? What was his business? His reputation? Was he in the habit of going armed? Did he have any enemies?"

The priest smiled and interrupted with a gesture the barrage of questions that had been delivered all in a breath.

"Not so fast, *monsieur le corporal.* I desire to answer you truly. And one must have time to ponder. I knew this man, Louis Gagnon, but slightly. He is a newcomer in the village, having lived among us less than a year. He found lodging with the Widow Chartier, whose house is reached by this cartway. His business, I am told, has to do with the lending of money. As to his reputation, I have heard nothing definite against it—"

"What do you mean—definite?"

The priest hesitated at the short clipped question.

"Why—I mean that I have heard nothing upon which one could lay his finger and say this, or that, is a bad act. It is rumored that his rate of interest is high, even to usury, and it is conceivable that he has thus made enemies. I have not heard that he went about armed. We are a peaceful community. We do not go about armed."

"Some one did," said Downey dryly, indicating the knife haft that protruded from the dead man's chest. "Looks to me like a huntin' knife—such a knife as would not ordinarily be carried by a townsman."

As he spoke Downey stooped and, removing a wallet from the dead man's pocket, glanced at its contents, then thrust it into his own. From other pockets he removed a penknife, a handkerchief, a small note book, a gold pencil and a bunch of keys.

"At least, robbery wasn't the motive," he said. "I guess we'll have to look for an enemy. You haven't got any theory—any suspicion about who might have done it?"

The priest's brow drew into a thoughtful frown and he answered gravely:

"Of myself, I know nothing. There was a dance last night at the home of Antoine Gauthier. I did not attend. But, this morning, when this deed became noised abroad, there has been much talk among these—my people. The name they are mentioning is that of François Deschamps, a lad who, though of wild and reckless habits, I am loath to believe would commit a murder."

"What makes 'em think he done it?"

"They are saying that, being the worse for wine, François challenged Louis to fight him and, when Louis refused, that he threatened to kill him if he danced again with Céleste Cardinal. They say, also, that Louis did dance again with Céleste."

"Where is he now—this François?"

"It is said that he can not be found. Both his father and his brother say that he did not return home last night."

"This brother—was he at the dance?"

"Yes. It was with him that Céleste Cardinal went."

"Is he wild, too?"

"No, Jean Baptiste is a young man of excellent habits. He is a clerk in the bank. They are twins—François and Jean Baptiste—and so alike in size and in features that were they to dress and act alike, it would be hard to distinguish the one from the other. But, whereas François is joyous and lovable, Jean Baptiste is of a serious nature and of conduct above reproach."

"Um-m-m," said Downey. "You say this young lady went to the dance with Jean Baptiste; yet it was François who threatened Louis Gagnon?"

"Ah, yes, monsieur, that is true. But it is a simple matter and easily explained. Céleste Cardinal is the belle of the village. Among the most ardent of the suitors for her hand are, or rather, were, these three—the two Deschamps boys and Louis Gagnon. Rumor had it that François was the more favored one—and indeed she was to be seen more often in his company than with the others. For some reason, she went to the dance with Jean Baptiste, instead of with François. But that would not prevent François from threatening Louis Gagnon, for he is of rougher mold than Jean Baptiste, being a riverman; and moreover, they say he was flushed with wine. Jean Baptiste does not drink wine, nor would he challenge one to fight, nor threaten to kill him."

"U-m-m. Looks like a kind of open-an'-shut case, don't it, Father? This François gets drunk at the dance an'

wants to fight Gagnon, an' then threatens to kill him, an' later Gagnon is found stabbed to death with François's knife—an' François has skipped out."

"That is true. That is true," assented the simple priest. "And, yet, despite his carousing and his wild ways, it is hard to believe that François would commit a murder."

"The combination of wine an' women, Father, has made a murderer out of many a good fellow. I take it that this man was killed last night on his way home from the dance. You say he would pass this way to reach his lodgings? Who found him?"

"Yes, he would pass this way. He was found by Nicolas Caron and his wife who almost stumbled over the body on their way to early mass. Nicolas ran to the church and told of finding a dead man, and I accompanied those who were there to this place. I feared that it was a murder, so I had word telephoned to the police. He had been dead for several hours when I arrived." He paused and, taking a handkerchief from his pocket, handed it to the officer. "I recovered this from the ground near the body for fear it would be trampled under foot by the curious who, as soon as the news passed around, must come flocking to view the poor corpse with their own eyes. It was doubtless used by the assassin to wipe the blood from his hands."

Corporal Downey handed the handkerchief to the constable, who placed it in his pocket. Stooping over the body, he removed the knife from the wound, being careful not to touch the hilt. As the blade came free, he paused for a moment in puzzled surprise and then hastily opened the man's waistcoat and shirt and closely examined the wounds in the bared chest into which the knife had been plunged four times. Whereat the villagers, from curiosity and from the pushing of those behind, crowded in so close as to almost trample the body, despite the repeated admonitions of the good priest and the uniformed constable to make room.

They had stood in a tight packed circle, staring in respectful and stolid solemnity all during the conversation between Downey and the priest which, having been conducted in English, was unintelligible to all but two or three who, with many gestures, acted as interpreters to their immediate neighbors.

Having concluded his examination and satisfied himself that the man carried no weapon upon his person, Downey rose to his feet.

"There are certain people I would like to question for a moment. The man and his wife who found the body—are they here?"

THE PRIEST raised his voice. "Nicolas Caron!" he called, and the name was repeated from a dozen throats, as a small man approached through the crowd which opened to give passage to him and to an enormously fat woman who followed close at his heels.

As neither the man nor the woman understood English, the priest offered his service as interpreter.

"Jest ask him to describe findin' the body."

The priest spoke a few word, and the man launched into a voluble discourse that involved much pointing with the hands and shrugging of the shoulders, his good wife now and then chiming in with a correction or an observation to which he paid not the slightest attention, until he had evidently reached the end of the narrative. Then the woman suddenly broke into a tirade, during which words poured from her lips in a torrent, her beefy face reddened, and her piglike eyes gleamed with anger, while the crowd roared with laughter and the little man blinked owlishly and held his peace.

"What did she say?" asked Downey, when the priest finally silenced her. "There seems to be some difference of opinion about what took place."

"It is not that, monsieur. Nicolas has told how they were coming along this cartway on their way to early mass, and

that it was quite dark here because of the many trees, and that they were walking along and his wife was upbraiding him because their pig died yesterday, and she was talking very fast and he was walking along behind her, and she stopped suddenly and screamed, and he bumped into her and nearly pushed her over the body which was lying just where it is now. And Nicolas was saying that he came as fast as possible to tell the people at the church. It was then that she spoke up and berated him with much feeling because he ran away after one glance at the corpse and left her alone in the darkness with the dead man. As monsieur can see, it would not be easy for her to run swiftly away, and it made her very angry to be left behind."

"You might tell 'em I say he done right in lettin' folks know as quick as he could," said Downey; and added, "What with the dead pig hangin' over him, he looks like he's had troubles enough. I don't suppose he noticed any one along the trail here—or any other detail of interest?"

"He says he saw nothing but the body. In fact, he remembers nothing until he arrived at the church."

"He'll prob'ly have his memory jogged," laughed Downey, with a glance at the irate woman who scowled into his face and, turning away, began to harangue the crowd in a loud voice.

A half dozen of those who had attended the dance were questioned, and all admitted having heard François challenge Louis Gagnon to fight, and had heard him threaten to kill the deceased if he should again dance with Céleste Cardinal. They admitted, also, that Louis did thereafter dance several times with the girl. But all insisted that they had paid no heed to the threat, regarding it as but a jest.

"Should you like to speak with Jean Baptiste Deschamps, the brother of François?" asked the priest.

"Is he here?" asked Downey.

"No, he is at home. It is the small house across the street from the house of M. Cardinal."

"Across the street, eh? No, I guess there wouldn't be any use talkin' to him at present. The case looks pretty plain. I can find him later if I want him. He talks English, don't he?"

"Oh, yes. Both François and Jean Baptiste speak the English perfectly."

"By the way, you say that Miss Cardinal went to the dance with Jean Baptiste. Would you mind askin' these folks if any one noticed if she left the dance with him?"

A half dozen answered the priest's question, asserting that she did leave the dance with Jean Baptiste, that they were among the first to leave.

"That'll be about all, Father," said Downey. "I'm obliged for your help. I'll be around here for awhile yet. Want to have a look at the dead man's effects—might be something that will throw more light on the case. An' I'll want a good description of François. This Widow Chartier—does she take boarders?"

"But, yes, monsieur, I think she will be glad to take you, now that Louis is gone."

"Can we drive to the house?" asked the officer, dubiously eyeing the narrow cartway.

"Yes. But not by this way. The street leads past her house, at the first turn to the right beyond the bridge. This lane is but a short cut. Is it now that we may remove the body?"

Downey nodded.

"As far as I'm concerned. Have you notified his relatives an' the local authorities?"

"The local authorities are all here," smiled the priest. "We know not if he has any relatives. It may be that you will discover their whereabouts among his papers."

CHAPTER V

AT THE HOME OF MADAME CHARTIER

CORPORAL DOWNEY and Constable Sims unearthed no clue as to relatives among the papers of Louis Gagnon, for the simple reason that there were no papers. Minute scrutiny

of the man's room revealed not so much as the scratch of a pen. Clothing there was, of sufficient quantity and of good quality, most of which bore the marks of dealers in Halifax and Quebec. An empty traveling bag, the usual complement of toilet articles, and a trunk in the bottom of which, beneath the neatly folded clothing, was an unloaded automatic pistol and a box of cartridges, seemed to constitute the dead man's sole possessions.

Corporal Downey finished listing the contents of the wallet he had taken from the corpse and, settling back in his chair, lighted his pipe and glanced across the little table at Constable Sims.

"Looks like he carried his office in his pocket," he said, his eyes straying to the table whereon were neatly arranged a dozen or more notes of hand, calling for the payment on demand of various sums ranging from twenty-five to two hundred dollars.

There were seven hundred and twenty dollars in currency, a memorandum showing a deposit in the local bank of five thousand dollars, a check book and the receipt for a safety deposit box. There were also the penknife and the bunch of keys, a neat gold pencil and a small notebook. A little to one side lay the bloodstained handkerchief turned over by the priest, and the death knife, its haft protected by a wrapping of paper.

"What do you make of the case?" Corporal Downey asked.

The younger man smiled.

"Why, it's so plain that there's no room for speculation. This François got liquored up and, in a fit of jealousy, followed Gagnon from the dance and knocked him off. All we've got to do to have an open-and-shut case is to establish the fact that this knife belongs to François—then get our man, and any jury in the world would hang him on the first ballot."

The old corporal nodded as he puffed slowly at his pipe.

"Yes. I expect maybe you're right—most any jury would hang him."

"Sure they would!" exclaimed the young constable, with just a trace of impatience in his tone. He was a very young constable, and he added, "So, after we verify the ownership of the knife, there won't be any use of our hanging around here. If all trails were as plain as this one there wouldn't be very much to policing."

The grizzled veteran of the service eyed the rookie pityingly.

"There's dim trails in policin', son—an' there's plain trails—an' there's trails that's too damn' plain. If every trail was as plain as this, I'd say there'd be a hell of a lot to policin'. Take you an' me, now. Since we both stepped into that car at detachment we've both heard the same things an' seen the same things—identical. You say the case is so plain that there ain't no room for speculation. I wouldn't go quite so far as that, but I admit it looks fairly plain. From what you've seen an' heard, you believe that Louis Gagnon was murdered by François Deschamps. That's funny, now, when you come to think of it; because, from seein' an' hearin' exactly the same things, I ain't even got a suspicion that François done it."

"What!" The younger man was staring as if he thought the other had taken leave of his senses.

"Yump. I can't see it that way at all. You better git in the car an' drive back to detachment. I'll jest hang around here fer a day or so an' see if I'm right."

The constable rose from his chair, his face a brick red. At the door he turned to face the older man.

"Corporal Downey," he said, a bit stiffly, "I know something of your reputation in the Service. And I know that there isn't one chance in a thousand that I'm right and you're wrong. But I do know that if I'm as far off as that on my first important case, I've missed my calling. If you can show that François Deschamps didn't kill Gagnon, I'll resign from the Service and get a job as doorman in an old ladies' home!"

The kindly gray eyes of the old corporal were twinkling.

"That would be kind of pikin', wouldn't it, son—to quit cold that way? Policin's like everything else that's worth while, it's got to be learnt. A good policeman ain't made in a minute, an' he ain't made in six months in the Regina barracks, neither. S'pose, instead of quittin' you go back an' write down everything you remember about this case. Don't turn it in. Keep it till I git back an' then we'll kind of talk it over together."

After the younger man had gone, Corporal Downey sat for a long time staring straight ahead of him. His pipe went out and he relighted it.

"It's prob'ly François's knife, all right," he muttered, "but he never left it where I found it. Admittin' he was drunk at the dance, he wasn't drunk enough to have left his knife stickin' in a dead man's chest, or he'd have be'n too drunk to have followed Gagnon an' killed him. But—if he didn't do it, who did? An' why was the knife stuck into the man after he was dead? An' why did François skip out? As far as I can see, the only one to profit by the murder is this Jean Baptiste. With Gagnon dead, and François God knows where, he's got the field clear with the girl."

Leaning forward, he selected Jean Baptiste's note of hand with the demand and the promise to pay pinned to it and, after studying it for a few moments, opened the notebook. Two pages had been torn from it. The torn edge of the demand fitted the torn edge in the note book. Placing both in his pocket, he speculated further:

"This may, or may not, have somethin' to do with the case. The note is dated thirty days back, but the pencilin' on that paper is fresh. Guess I'll have a little talk with Mr. Jean Baptiste Deschamps."

He wrapped the handkerchief and the knife in paper and placed them in his pocket also and, stepping from the room, found Madame Chartier waiting to announce dinner. As he partook of the homely but well prepared meal he drew from the widow, in a blending of French and broken English, with an occasional dabbing at the eyes with a corner of her apron, that Louis Gagnon had been a "nice man," who was quiet and orderly and who always paid his bills promptly.

"No—he never had any visitors. Yes, he occasionally went away for a week at a time, but he always paid for the time he was gone the same as if he had been here. No, he never spoke of his people, or where he had come from. He was a silent man, not given to conversation. One would not think anybody would kill a good man like Louis Gagnon—but that François Deschamps was a wild one!"

Did the policeman think he would catch François and hang him? The widow admitted that she had never seen a hanging. Would they hang him here, or in Quebec? Would there be a charge for admission, or could all go and see? Well, now, maybe Céleste Cardinal would marry Jean Baptiste. That would be a good thing, because Jean Baptiste was not a wild one like François, and some day, doubtless, he would be a very great *banquier*, like M. Crevier who was born right over there in that small house, but who now lives in a fine *maison* in Quebec and owns one of the largest *banques*, and who, it is said, has even his own ships upon the sea.

CHAPTER VI

JEAN BAPTISTE TALKS

LEAVING the house, Corporal Downey took the cartway that was a short cut to the center of the little village. At the scene of the murder he paused and carefully went over the ground, but learned nothing, as the entire population of the village had milled and tramped about the spot for hours before the removal of the body.

He passed on and, just before reaching the street, his keen eye caught a tiny scrap of paper at the edge of the lane. Stooping, he picked it up. It was a stiff bit of paper, and on one side were the

printed words ". . . mise to pay. . . ." Stepping from the cartway into a weed patch, he found other scraps of paper and, at the end of an hour, had collected quite a handful. Some of the tiny pieces were of the stiff paper he had first found, others were evidently scraps torn from the leaf of a notebook—the notebook found in the pocket of Louis Gagnon—but all were blank, except the printed form of a note of hand.

Slipping the bits of paper into his pocket Corporal Downey passed from the cartway on to the street with its wooden sidewalks, its wooden stores with their raised porches, its little concrete bank building, and its two filling stations, all closed—for such was the observance of Sunday in the village. Little knots of men, evidently discussing the all absorbing murder, ceased their chatter and stared in silent curiosity as he passed.

Farther on the stores gave place to dwelling houses, some built flush against the sidewalks, others set back on small neat lawns. A young man approached, and Downey accosted him—

"Where does François Deschamps live?" he asked.

The man indicated a small white house a short distance up the street.

"He lives there," he answered in good English. "But—François is not at home. If there are questions you would ask, I will return with you to the house. I am Jean Baptiste Deschamps, the brother of François. This is a terrible thing that has come upon us. But, though François is my twin brother, I can not stand between him and the law. We will not be interrupted. My father has gone to the house of the priest."

"I know you must feel pretty bad," said Downey. "It's a nasty mess fer a man's brother to be in. I'm obliged for your offer of help. The case looks pretty plain, but there might be a point or two we could clear up. What I want most is a good description of François—photograph, if you've got one—an' there might be a few questions I'll want to ask."

"It is a sad duty," said the man sorrowfully, as he fell into step beside the officer. "But, as I said, I can not stand in the way of the law."

"Wants to talk," thought the old corporal grimly. "Had time to get his story all lined up, an' wants to get it off his chest. I'll jest let him spill me an earful."

As Jean Baptiste stooped to unlatch the little picket gate, Downey's glance roved the street.

"Nice place, acrost the way," he opined casually. "House like that runs up into money."

"Yes," answered Jean Baptiste. "That is the home of M. Cardinal, the banker. He is my employer."

He ushered Downey into a small neatly kept living room and bade him be seated. Seating himself upon the opposite side of a center table, he waited for the other to speak.

The old corporal cleared his throat, as if at a loss to begin.

"Now, of course, I don't suppose you know nothin' about this—that is, nothin' direct or definite. If a man's goin' to kill some one he don't go round invitin' folks to see him do it—even his own brother. But some of the folks that was at the dance told me this mornin' that François had be'n drinkin' kind of liberal, an' that he challenged this Louis Gagnon to a fight, an' when he wouldn't fight, he threatened to kill him if he danced again with some girl. Know anything about that?"

"Yes. That is true."

"You heard the challenge an' the threat?"

"I did not hear the challenge to fight, nor Louis's refusal. That took place in the kitchen. I was dancing in the next room. But I distinctly heard François threaten to kill Louis if he should dance again with Céleste Cardinal, because Louis had come from the kitchen into the dancing room, and François followed him to the door and threatened in a loud voice."

"Did you think he meant it at the time?"

The other hesitated a moment.

"Well—I was afraid he meant it."

"The others claimed that they never believed he meant it. They thought it was the liquor talkin'."

"I know François better than they."

"Has he ever killed any one before?"

"No."

"Has he ever threatened to?"

"Not that I know of."

"Then what do you mean—you know him better than they?"

"Why, I mean—being his brother, I naturally would know him better—I—there was something in the way he said it that made me fear that he meant it."

"Did you tell Gagnon that you thought François meant to kill him?"

"No."

"Did you speak to François about it?"

"No."

"Didn't do nothin' about it, at all, eh?"

The younger man cleared his throat nervously.

"Yes—I did. I was afraid that François meant to harm Louis, so when the people began to talk of going home, I spoke to Céleste, who had accompanied me to the dance, and told her of my fears. She laughed at them—but I insisted that we go early so I could return and prevent François from carrying out his threat. We did leave early, and I left Céleste at her home and hurried back to the house of Antoine Gauthier—it was there the dance was held. But when I arrived, I found that both François and Louis had gone. I knew the way Louis must take to reach his lodgings, and I hurried to warn him. I was in time to see François turn into the cartway, and I started to run after him. I had almost reached him when I saw him overtake Louis. I saw François's arm rise and fall several times. I heard the sound of blows, and a low cry, or groan. I saw Louis sink to the ground. And I stood there gazing in horror at the body lying there with the knife sticking from its chest. Then I looked into the face of François, who was wiping the blood from his hands on a handkerchief.

" 'My God,' I cried. 'What have you done, my brother?' And as he tossed the handkerchief to the ground, he answered that he had done as he said he would do. I said, 'This is murder! They will hang you!' And he said, 'By God, they'll catch me first! New York is big—and Boston. I will keep back from the highways and reach the border—and to hell with the police!' The next moment he was gone."

"H-u-m," murmured Downey. "So you seen him do it, eh?"

"Yes—I saw it plainly. I was very close, and the moon made light enough to see—even there in that shaded lane."

"Well, that sort of clears the case up, don't it?"

THE OLD corporal explored the inside of his cheek with his tongue.

"I have related what I saw."

"I guess that settles it then. There's one or two little questions—an' then if you'll give me a description of François, that'll be about all. Let's see—where was we? Oh, yes, you was standin' there in the lane with the body, an' François was gone. What did you do then?"

"I went home."

"Didn't run an' tell no one what you'd seen?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Why—I—I was excited, I suppose. I was afraid they'd catch François. One does not wish to see one's brother hanged—even if he did kill a man."

"That's so," admitted Downey thoughtfully. "A man wouldn't—most men. Was your father home when you got here?"

"Yes, he was asleep."

"An' you didn't wake him up an' tell him what François had done?"

"No. I was too excited to think. I went in and threw myself upon the bed, and after a long while I got up and undressed. I must have slept, for the next thing I knew it was daylight and they were pounding on the door and shouting

that Louis Gagnon had been murdered, and asking for François."

"Did you tell 'em then about the killin'?"

"No. My father and I told them only that François had not been home during the night. Then I told my father about François's threat—but not that I had witnessed the—the murder. My father is an old man. I feared the shock might kill him."

"Well, it might," admitted Downey, "if his heart was bad. But—if you wouldn't tell the others, why did you tell me?"

"I have had time to think it over, and I believe that, no matter what the cost, one should not stand in the way of the law."

"That's right. You knew Louis Gagnon pretty well?"

"No, very slightly."

"What business was he in?"

"I do not know, for certain. He did not seem to have much of any business. I would see him occasionally upon the street, or in the bank, or at dances. It seems to me that I have heard that he loaned money, but as to that I can not say."

"Never had no dealin's with him?"

"No."

"Never borrowed no money from him, or done business in any way whatever with him?"

"No."

"Don't know for sure that he ever loaned money to any one?"

"No—only that I have heard, somewhere, that he did."

"Didn't have no grudge against him of any kind?"

"No. I knew him but slightly."

"How'd you an' François get along?"

"Why, we're brothers. François did some things of which I do not approve. He drank more than he should—and went about with companions who were wild and reckless in their habits."

"Wasn't you both courtin' the same girl?"

"Yes—that is—Miss Cardinal goes sometimes with him, sometimes with me."

"You didn't hold no grudge against him for that, I s'pose?"

"No, certainly not. François and I were always the best of friends."

"Now, right after you left the dance you say you took Miss Cardinal home—that would be to the big house acrost the street?"

"Yes."

"An', then, you hurried right back to the dance? You didn't come home here, first, did you—to see if François was here?"

"No. I returned at once to the dance."

"Which direction is that from Cardinal's door, where you left the girl?"

"It is up the street—away from town—the opposite direction from which we walked here."

"How far is it from Cardinal's to Gauthier's house where the dance was held?"

"I should say about three or four blocks. There are no cross streets beyond here."

"An' when you got back to the dance, who told you that Louis an' François had left."

"No one told me. As I reached the yard, I saw that all the guests had departed. I did not go up to the house. I wanted to hurry and overtake François."

"You didn't see no one, then? Didn't meet no one comin' away from the dance?"

"No."

"That's kind of funny, ain't it? They must have got away in a hurry."

"No. Nearly all of them would take the other street in returning from the dance—the street that runs parallel to this—the one the church is on."

"I see," said Downey absently.

Reaching into his pocket, he withdrew the knife he had taken from the body and slipped the wrapping of paper from its haft. Holding it by the blade between his thumb and forefinger, he asked—

"Do you recognize this knife?"

"Yes. It is François's knife."

"The knife he used to kill Louis Gagnon with?"

"Yes—the same. I saw it plainly sticking from the wound in Louis's breast."

"You would swear to that on the witness stand?"

"Yes, I would have to. It is François's knife."

"Huntin' knife," commented the officer, eyeing the weapon thoughtfully. "Such a knife is generally carried in a sheath on a belt. Was it François's habit to carry this knife?"

"No, not since we have come to live here in the village. He used to carry it when he hunted and trapped on the rivers."

"What rivers?"

"The upper Peace and its tributaries. My father was a factor until two years ago when sickness forced him to retire."

"You don't think François would try to make his way back there?"

Jean Baptiste shrugged.

"Why should one go to a country where every one knows him? He spoke of New York, and of Boston."

"Then, if François wasn't in the habit of carryin' this knife, he must of had some special reason fer carryin' it to the dance?"

"It would seem so."

"He went alone to the dance?"

"Yes."

"An' Louis Gagnon went alone?"

"Yes."

"Now, you say the moonlight was bright enough so you could see pretty plain down there in the lane?"

"Yes. I stood very close when Louis sank to the ground."

"You could see his hands—Louis's?"

"Why—I don't remember his hands. I—I remember only his face—and the handle of that knife sticking from his chest."

"You didn't see no weapon either in his hands, or on the ground after he fell—no knife, nor gun?"

"No, I saw no weapon."

"Louis was unarmed, then? He couldn't have attacked François, an' François killed him in self-defense?"

"He did not attack François. I saw François attack him. Louis had no weapon. I am sure I would have seen it if he had."

"Now, once more, I wish you'd tell me exactly what you saw. How many blows François struck. How long between the blows—everything you remember about the actual killin'."

"I must have been within twenty feet of François when he overtook Louis. I was about to cry out a warning, when I saw Louis whirl around and then I saw François's arm go up and down three or four times, and I heard the sound as the blows landed, and then a kind of a groan, as Louis sank to the ground and lay there with the knife sticking in his breast."

"You didn't touch the knife—didn't pull it out—or try to pull it out—either while François was there, or after he went away?"

"No. There was no use. The man was dead."

"How much time did this take?"

"I do not know. I gave no heed to time—a minute—half a minute—surely not longer. He struck, and struck again—and again."

"Then, how much longer did François stay there, while you was talkin'?"

"Maybe two minutes—three—five. It was not long."

"How long was you there with the body after François left?"

"No time at all. When I saw that François had gone, I went also."

"You didn't try to follow him?"

"No. I went home as fast as I could."

REPLACING the knife in his pocket, Downey drew a small packet from another pocket and, unwrapping its covering of paper, held up the blood smeared handkerchief.

"Is this the handkerchief that François wiped his hands on an' then throw'd away?"

Jean Baptiste leaned forward and examined it closely.

"Yes," he answered, "that is the handkerchief."

"How do you know?"

The man smiled.

"Why, I saw him wipe the blood upon it—and it is the kind of handkerchief that François and I own. See, here is one just like it." Removing a handkerchief from his pocket, he tossed it on to the table.

Downey picked it up and compared the two.

"Yes," he admitted. "It's the same." Then he smiled into the face of the other. "But—this don't prove nothin' except that this bloody one might be *your* handkerchief. How do I know you two used the same kind?"

The other's smile widened.

"Do you know I was just thinking of that? But, if you will follow me a moment, I think I can satisfy you. Our rooms are upstairs. I will show you both mine and his. You will find handkerchiefs alike in both."

Downey followed up the steep wooden stairs and into the room of François. In the top drawer of a small dresser he found a pile of neatly ironed handkerchiefs. Selecting one, he compared it with the blood stained one and nodded.

"Jest alike," he said. "I'll keep these—yours an' his, along with the bloody one."

Wrapping each separately, he placed them in different pockets, the while his keen gray eyes took in each minute detail of the room. The place was not particularly orderly. The clothing François had evidently removed when he dressed for the dance, lay upon the bed and a chair. Several pairs of shoes had been tossed into a corner, and from the top of this pile, Downey stooped and recovered a leather belt with a knife sheath attached.

"Here's the sheath for his knife, all right. I'll jest take it along—to prove his ownership of the knife conclusive. But he either come back here an' got the knife after the dance—or else he carried it loose in his pocket—an' that would be unhandy at a dance."

Jean Baptiste nodded thoughtfully.

"It is possible—if he had left the dance immediately after Céleste and I did he could have slipped in here and got his knife and then overtaken Louis in the cartway. I had not thought of that."

"Looks reasonable. That's a mean knife to carry without a sheath. An' it kind of shows he didn't intend to commit no murder till after he'd got liquored up at the dance; then he run home an' got his knife."

"That's it!" agreed the other. "He must have done just that. He could have slipped in here while I was talking with Céleste at the door."

"Thought you run right back to the dance?"

"One pauses for a moment or two to say good night. I unlocked the door for her. He could have slipped in then—and out after I had gone back."

"That's so. Well, now we'll have a look at your room, an' I'll be goin', after I get a description of François."

The room of Jean Baptiste, across a narrow, dark little hallway, was more orderly than that of François. As before, not a detail escaped Downey's eyes. Jean Baptiste opened the dresser drawer and pointed to a pile of handkerchiefs similar to the others and, taking one with him, Downey turned to the door.

Once more in the living room, he seated himself with notebook and pencil, while Jean Baptiste minutely described his brother's size, weight, color of hair, eyes and so forth; and the clothing he wore. There was no photograph except one taken two years before, of both the brothers, standing side by side, and dressed exactly alike. Downey grinned as he held it to the light.

"It would be hell if we was to hang the wrong man," he said.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw the other start.

"What do you mean?" asked Jean Baptiste.

"Oh—jest a little joke. Lookin' so much alike, thataway, it would be easy to git the good mixed up with the bad. Well, I'll be goin'. I'm obliged fer the help

you've give me. I want to phone this description into detachment so they can git it spread around. It would be too bad to let him git acrost the line."

CHAPTER VII

AND CÉLESTE

IN THE evening Corporal Downey called at the home of M. Cardinal. The old Frenchman greeted him with grave courtesy and ushered him into a large living room in which a wood fire blazed in a stone fireplace. The two seated themselves in deep comfortable chairs, wine was brought and, after a pause, the old banker invited conversation—

"How can I serve you, *monsieur le corporal?*"

"I don't know that you can," Downey answered. "You know, of course, why I am here in your village. A man was found dead with a knife stickin' between his ribs. It looks like a murder. It's my business to find out who killed Louis Gagnon. I know, sir, that you have no knowledge of the crime. I suppose you know that one François Deschamps is suspected. You have doubtless heard of the threat at the dance, an' all that. You know, too, that they're sayin' that it was done in a fit of jealousy over your daughter. I'd like a few minutes interview with her—not, of course, that I think she knows anything about the killin', but I want to check some information I've picked up."

"I understand perfectly. I shall send for her."

"Jest a minute. I know that no man stands in the position you do in a town of this size unless he's got judgment an' brains—"

The older man smiled.

"You flatter me, monsieur."

"No, I don't. You know every man, woman an' child for miles around. It's your business to know them. I'd like you to give me your honest opinion of François Deschamps. I won't need to tell you that it will be confidential."

The old man bowed and, placing the tips of his fingers together, stared into the fire. After a few moments he spoke:

"François Deschamps," he said, "is a young man of brains, and of imagination. Had he the right chance, I think he would go far in whatever line of endeavor he essayed. His habits are wild. He drinks more than is advisable. But—he is a man. I, myself, in my younger days, was not above reproach. I know that he is a suitor for the hand of my daughter. I have not forbidden him my house. I like him. He is lovable and generous. He may have killed Louis Gagnon. He never murdered any man."

"Some one was sayin' that there is always a black sheep in each generation of Deschamps," hazarded Downey.

"Ah, yes. It is so said—and not without reason. I have known three generations of Deschamps. But—what is a black sheep? François, because of his drinking and carousing, has rightfully been so called. A black sheep does not necessarily mean a criminal. I have known several so-called black sheep in my time that were most lovable. Of such is François Deschamps."

"An' Jean Baptiste? I believe he works for you."

"Jean Baptiste is of a different stamp. He is an excellent clerk. But he has no imagination. He will, doubtless, always be an excellent clerk."

"Got any money saved up?"

"No. He is paying for the house in which the Deschamps live—he and François."

"Could have put his hands on, say, a couple of hundred dollars within three or four days, though, couldn't he?"

"No, not in any way of which I know. He has overdrawn his salary for several months to come to meet a payment on the house. May I ask why you are inquiring as to the financial status of Jean Baptiste? It interests me—for obvious reasons."

"Oh, nothin'. I jest wanted to know, maybe, if he could have financed François's getaway. They say blood's thicker

than water, you know. If I could have a few minutes with your daughter, I'd like it."

The old man bowed and left the room. A moment later Corporal Downey stood up to face a beautiful girl who walked slowly toward him. He greeted her in a kindly voice that at once put her at ease.

"Miss Céleste, I won't bother you but a few minutes. You know why I'm here?"

She nodded, looking him steadily in the eye.

"François Deschamps never killed Louis Gagnon," she said.

"Who did?" The question sounded abrupt—even sharp.

"I do not know who did. It was not François."

"How do you know?"

"I know that François would scorn to attack an unarmed man."

"You know him well—"

The girl interrupted with a vehemence that surprised Downey.

"I know him very well—better than I know any one! I love him!"

"May I ask, then, why you went to the dance with Jean Baptiste?"

"Because François and I had quarreled. We often quarrel. I take him to task for his drinking, and he laughs at me, and it makes me very angry."

"But François threatened to kill Louis Gagnon at the dance," reminded Downey.

"It was the wine. François was angry because I went with Jean Baptiste. And, I meant him to be angry. It was to make him angry that I danced so much with Louis Gagnon, whom I dislike. It was to make him angry that I wore Jean Baptiste's ring!"

"Ring?"

"Yes—he gave me the ring a month ago, and I have not worn it. I always intended to give it back to him. I sent it back today. But—I wore it to the dance to make François angry."

"You do not think he meant to make good his threat to kill Louis Gagnon?"

"I know he did not mean it!"

"But it was François's knife that killed him. And, if he is innocent, why did he run away?"

"I do not care if it was François's knife. I do not know why he ran away. I know he did not kill him."

NEVER, thought the old corporal as he gazed into the flashing eyes, had he seen finer loyalty than this. It was almost on the end of his tongue to whisper that he, too, knew it—but he refrained. Instead, he said—

"Will you answer one or two direct questions, Miss Céleste?"

"I will answer anything you choose to ask, if I can. When the truth is known, François will be cleared."

"You left the dance with Jean Baptiste, earlier than most of the folks?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Jean Baptiste wanted to leave early. He told me he was afraid that François would try to kill Louis Gagnon, because of the threat. But I laughed at him and told him he was a fool."

"But you left the dance anyhow?"

"Yes. It was nearly over. And I did not care to argue with him."

"You came directly here, did you?"

"Yes, we walked fast."

"Did Jean Baptiste come into the house with you?"

"No. I did not ask him to. He unlocked the door for me, said good night and then he hurried away."

"Now, you didn't, by any chance, notice which way he went?"

"Yes, I did. I did not mean to, but the moon was quite bright, and I stepped for a moment to the window after I had closed the door. I saw Jean Baptiste turn, after he had gone a short distance toward Antoine Gauthier's, and cross the street, and hurry into his own home. Then I went to bed."

"Why do you think he done that?"

"I do not know—unless he changed his mind about going back to François."

"Maybe," insinuated Downey, "if he

had gone back, he'd have prevented the killin'."

The girl shook her head.

"No. François did not do it."

Impulsively the old corporal reached down and lifted one of her hands into both his own.

"You jest stick to that way of thinkin', Miss Céleste," he said gruffly. "I've be'n policin' fer quite a spell—an' I never yet hanged the wrong man."

The blue eyes raised, and something in the glitter of the cold gray ones of the officer seemed suddenly to electrify her with hope.

"Oh, do you, too, believe—"

Downey interrupted.

"It's contrary to manuals, regulations, laws, by-laws, constitutions an' amendments, for a police officer to talk about a case. I can say, though, that we're goin' to crack a neck fer this murder—an' it won't be the wrong neck. But the job we've got on our hands now is to find François Deschamps."

Instantly the hand was jerked from his, and the blue eyes flashed.

"You're a brute!" cried the girl. "I hate you! If you find François you will hang him. But I will know, to my dying day, that you *have* hanged the wrong man!" The next instant she was gone, and Corporal Downey smiled grimly, as he recovered his hat and found the way to the door alone.

That evening, in his room, he meticulously fitted together the little scraps of paper he had collected in the weed patch. They formed a perfectly blank note of hand, and a blank page from a notebook. It was the missing page from the notebook of Louis Gagnon. There were only a few scraps missing.

The next day he made guarded inquiry of the local jeweler, who was also the fitter of glasses, and found that Jean Baptiste Deschamps had purchased a certain ring of the value of two hundred dollars upon the second of June, just past. The note of hand bore the date of June first.

Then he telephoned his detachment and ordered a car. It was Constable Sims who drove down to get him.

When they were well on their way, the good constable permitted himself a self-satisfied grin.

"I see, Corporal Downey, you came around to my way of thinking."

"Yeh? Well, there's eye doctors in Montreal."

The constable protested—

"I mean—I see you figure François Deschamps was guilty, after all."

"Yeh?"

"Why, yes. Didn't you phone in his description yesterday, with orders to broadcast it all over Canada—and the States, too?"

"Yump. S'pose you jest 'tend to your knittin' around some of these curves. When they come to bury me I don't want 'em to have to unwrap me from around one of these telephone poles. D'you write down all you seen an' heard about that case?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, me an' you's goin' into executive session when we git time. Say, there's woodcock along that crick. You ain't got a shotgun along?"

Back in the village the old ones were saying that Louis Gagnon was no great loss, anyway, as he loaned money at a high per cent. interest. But, even so, others pointed out, François Deschamps should not have killed him because he danced with Céleste Cardinal at the dance of Antoine Gauthier.

Anyway, it was a thing to talk about, and now they would see what the police would do.

Never before had the Mounted Police been called to the village.

One said:

"That old one—*le corporal*, he does not look very smart—and Father Barthe says that he does not talk the good English, but like one who is from the streets. Well, if they catch François, it will be a grand sight to see a man hanged, especially a man you know. Many have even said they would not go and see it. *Voilà!* And some are even so lacking in patriotism."

CHAPTER VIII

JEAN BAPTISTE GETS A NEW JOB

A DAY or so later Corporal Downey paused beside a desk where Constable Sims was toiling over the recapitulation of the detachment's annual report. He held in his hand a series of photographs that had just been turned over to him by the criminal investigation branch.

"If you'll come into my room an' fetch along what you've got wrote down about that Gagnon murder case, we'll kind of talk it over," he invited.

The younger officer accepted with alacrity. Pausing only to withdraw some folded sheets from a drawer, he followed into a small room and settled into an indicated chair. The old corporal was a sort of tutelary deity among the younger men of the force. A rookie either made or broke himself quickly under Downey, that strange, inscrutable man who down through the years had, for some reason known only to himself, absolutely refused any promotion beyond the rank of corporal. It was common knowledge that he could have been an inspector, or superintendent—and some even whispered, commissioner.

"Smoke up, if you want to," said Downey, with just the flicker of an eyelid, "but you better jest shove that door shut, so the staff sergeant don't catch us at it."

He took the neatly typed pages from the other's hand and, with pipe a-light and heels on his desk, scanned them closely. At the end of ten minutes he looked up with a grin.

"Well, now, son, that's a pretty good flat statement of what we seen an' heard. Sort of a school teacher's essay on a day in the country. But it's a damn' poor police report, fer the simple reason that if it was acted on—an' we picked up François Deschamps—he'd git hung.

"Let's look at it the way I seen it. In the first place the thing was too damn' plain. François gits tight, threatens to kill Louis, an' a few hours later Louis is found dead with François's knife in his ribs. It ain't reasonable. First thing I thought of was—who benefited by the death of Louis an' the disappearance of François? Why, Jean Baptiste, the other lad that was in love with the girl. If François was drunk enough to leave his knife stickin' in the dead man, he would have be'n too drunk to have followed him an' killed him. Then there was the handkerchief—you remember the handkerchief that the priest found, an' I handed over to you. Did you notice anything funny about it? I mean anything except jest a bloody rag? I did. They said François was a sort of a regular he-man, a river man. Well, that handkerchief stunk of perfume! Then, again, you was lookin' when I pulled the knife out of his gizzard. Didn't you notice that it had be'n stuck into the man quite a while after he was dead? I did. The other stab wounds had bled freely, but only a little dark thick blood had oozed out around the edge of this one. Now, a man killin' another in a fit of jealous rage don't hang around awhile an' sink his knife into the dead body again, like that. He kills an' runs.

"Goin' on that, I hunts up Jean Baptiste, an' finds him dead anxious to talk. He done some plain an' fancy lyin'. Claimed not to know this Gagnon very well—an' yet never referred to him except by his first name. Claimed never to have had no dealin's with him, didn't even know what business he was in—yet we found his note of hand—"

"The damned fool!" exclaimed the constable. "Didn't he know his note would come to light?"

"No, he thought he'd tore it up. I found the pieces, but somehow this Louis had put one over on him. What he tore up was a blank. He claimed he thought François was goin' to kill Louis, an' he took the girl home early so's to go back an' stop him. Got there jest in time to see the whole show! Yump—he described the killin' to a hair, only he didn't say nothin' about the knife bein' stuck into the body after the man was dead. He done that later. Claimed he run right

back to the dance, after takin' the girl home, but she says she seen him cross the street an' go into his own house. That's when he got François's knife. I got a couple of his handkerchiefs. They both smell like the one the priest found—also I seen the bottle of perfume on his dresser. I went to François's room an' found his belt an' knife sheath in a corner where Jean Baptiste had throw'd it when he got the knife; an' there wasn't no perfume in his room, an' his handkerchiefs didn't stink of it. That's about all, except I've got the photos of the fingerprints that was on the bloody knifehandle."

"Do they tally with this Jean Baptiste's?" cried the younger man, excitedly.

"I don't know," answered Downey dryly. "I didn't take his prints."

"But didn't you arrest him? Surely you've got a clear case! I admit I'm just a dub. I suppose you phoned in François's description for publication before you found this out."

"Nope—after. No, I didn't arrest Jean Baptiste. It wouldn't be no use. Funny case, this. You was wrong in your deduction; yet any jury in the world would hang your man. I'm right, an' it would be impossible to convict my man on the evidence I've got."

The constable was staring at the older man in astonishment.

"Why?" he asked. "It looks like an open-and-shut case, if his fingerprints correspond to those on the knife. You can't lose."

"Can't win, you mean," contradicted the corporal. "That is, not till I can lay my hands on François Deschamps. Don't you see what will happen? Look at that!" He tossed the photograph of the two Deschamps boys to the constable. "They're as like as two peas in a pod. All Jean Baptiste's attorney would have to do would be to show a duplicate of that picture to the jury an' make a spiel about fingerprintin' bein' too new to be sure that two men so near alike wouldn't have the same fingerprints, jest like they've got the same noses, an' mouths an' chins—an' he'd get a disagreement, if not an out an' out acquittal. If we had François so's to git his prints, then we could go ahead an' hang Jean Baptiste. It's a case of get your man, as folks like to think our slogan is—only this time it's the wrong man. Until we can lay our hands on the wrong man, we'll never hang the right one."

The younger man sat staring out the window at the street traffic until Corporal Downey roused him.

"What's on your mind, son? You look like you'd lost somethin'?"

The other eyed him gravely.

"I've lost whatever idea I ever had that I'll make a policeman," he said, a trifle bitterly. "I'd have played the fool both ways from the middle. Even after you had convinced me I was wrong about François, I'd have gone ahead and arrested Jean Baptiste on the evidence—and he'd have gone scot free!"

"Policin's got to be learnt, son. If I didn't think you'd make a policeman I wouldn't fool away no time on you."

"There's one thing I don't see yet," said the younger man. "If François isn't guilty, why the devil did he skip out?"

Corporal Downey grinned.

"I was wonderin' if you wasn't goin' to ask that," he said. "An' it's about the only thing I ain't quite clear on. If them villagers hadn't tromped an' milled around the place I think we'd have found his tracks, maybe. I've got a hunch that he seen Jean Baptiste kill Louis Gagnon. Maybe François followed Gagnon to beat him up for dancin' with the girl, or maybe he seen Jean Baptiste followin' Gagnon, an' followed him. The reason don't make no difference. The facts is—Jean Baptiste done the killin' an' François done the skippin' out. An' if I ever lay my hands on François, I'll prove it!"

DILIGENT inquiry in Halifax and Quebec failed to locate any heirs of Louis Gagnon and, in turning his effects over to the public administrator, Corporal Downey withheld Jean Baptiste's note of hand for further use.

Months passed. Back in the little Quebec village the old ones nodded their heads sagely and said that the police are no good; they can not catch François Deschamps. Also they said that Céleste Cardinal is a foolish one. She is still thinking of François. Why can she not be sensible and marry Jean Baptiste? See, he is a steady one; he has even now been appointed an examiner of banks, and travels all over the country. Sometime he will be a great man like M. Crevier, who now lives in a grand *maison* in Quebec. She is getting old, she is twenty. Undoubtedly she will be a *fileuse*—and all because of François!

Jean Baptiste continued for several months to live in the village. He loved Céleste Cardinal, yet he dared not woo her. His consummate egotism blinded him to the fact that the girl cared nothing for him. He called upon her a few times, took her to an affair of the church, and again to a dance—but always he lived in terror of François. The threat of François hung over him like some vast, hovering shadow. The words of François were seared into his brain— "If you pursue Céleste I will know—and I will return—and I will kill as the wolf kills."

He feared François. He believed that François would keep his word. Life in the village became intolerable to Jean Baptiste. He heard that examinations were to be held for the position of bank examiner. He spoke to M. Cardinal. *Certainement!* The old banker would not stand in his way if he desired the position. He would even speak to M. Crevier, who stood high in the matter of *banques* and also with the Government. So Jean Baptiste fared forth from the village as an examiner of banks.

And as the months passed, although he scanned the papers daily, he read no account of the arrest of François. The police were fools. They should have caught him before he got to the border. Now maybe they would never get him, and he, Jean Baptiste, must ever live in the terror of François's vengeance. If they would only arrest François, hang him, then he could marry Céleste.

CHAPTER IX

LE LOUP BLANC

THE COMBINATION train jarred to a stop in the railway yard of a little town that was the terminal of a branch line in northern Saskatchewan. Snow, deep snow, flanked the right of way, piled high on each side by snowplows and the shovels of the section crews. Suitcase in hand, Jean Baptiste Deschamps stepped from the superheated coach and followed the half dozen passengers along the narrow footway between the cars and the snowbanks. The obsolete little engine, bearing a snowplow in front out of all proportion to its size, panted and wheezed with a self-satisfied air of duty done, as the steam escaped from a hundred rifts and vents in her anatomy and was wafted as a greasy vapor into the faces of those who passed alongside. A polyglot assembly of Indians, halfbreeds and whites eyed the new arrivals with interest. The arrival of the tri-weekly train was an event even in summer. In winter it was almost a miracle. Snow whirled in fine powdery flurries before the dimly lighted window of the station.

"Where's the hotel?" asked Jean Baptiste of a swart breed who dumped a trunk from his shoulders.

The man pointed toward a blur of light that showed dimly in the distance and, grasping his suitcase in his gloved hand, Jean Baptiste bowed his head to the storm.

"Ye're lucky to git in," opined the Boniface. "This 'un's from the nor'east. I've saw 'em last a week—an' another week 'fore they git the line open. Sellin' somethin'?"

Jean Baptiste registered.

"No. I'm the bank examiner."

"Bank examiner, eh? Well, well—beats all how citified we're gittin'. A year ago we wasn't nothin'. Then come the railroad, an' then the bank. Well, that's the

way she goes. Year er so, an' I'm goin' to hit out fer somewheres that's real. Jest as quick as I kin d'spose of my prop'ty. This here lot'll bring good money, what with bein' on the corner an' all."

A gale of laughter wafted in through a flimsy partition, and the landlord winked.

"The boys is kind of celebratin' a little. Le Loup Blanc's in town—an' when he's here they's always hell to pay."

"Le Loup Blanc?" asked Jean Baptiste with perfunctory interest. "And who is Le Loup Blanc?"

"Le Loup Blanc—that means White Wolf in French," explained the landlord, stretching his arms expansively across the pine desk that held the register and the inkwell and the withered potato that served as a pen holder. "The coat nails is drove in the wall behin' the door. Might's well set up to the stove. Supper ain't on till 6:00, an' t'ain't only 5:00. Gits dark early as hell in December. But we make up fer it in the summer, you bet. I've read a noospaper out in front at 11:20 P.M. in June. Done it on a bet. That's why we kin raise such good crops as fer north as what we be. This here's the comin' country, all right. Pay a man to buy in here."

"I thought you spoke of selling out," hazarded Jean Baptiste.

"Oh, sure, me. I'm like that. I don't give a damn fer a settled country. I'd ruther be out where they ain't no banks an' railroads an' such. Can't seem to git use' to 'em. Take Elbow Lake, now. I'm kind of figgerin' to start a hotel up there—hell, there ain't hardly nobody ever git's up there." Another wild peal of laughter all but drowned the words, and the landlord grinned. "You was askin' about Le Loup Blanc. Whenever he hits town there's always somethin' doin'. Every one gits drunk except them that's got to stay sober, personal. This is the third day they be'n at it. Me, I hed to sober up, on account it's bein' train day. After supper I'll whoop 'er up agin. Like's not he'll be gone by tomorrow. If you'd care to jine in, we'd be proud to hev' you."

"No, thanks," said Jean Baptiste. "I do not care to drink."

"Oh, that's all right." The man regarded the abstemiousness of Jean Baptiste as an infirmity. "They won't no one hold it agin you. Every man to his own way of doin'. I know'd a feller onct that didn't drink a damn' drop—an' he was a good feller too. Stummick wouldn't hold it, I guess, er mebbe it was religion."

Jean Baptiste felt himself mildly interested.

"Why should every one get drunk when Le Loup Blanc comes to town?"

"Oh, I dunno—jist nach'ly do. He's a damn' good feller, an' it seems like every one jist nach'ly takes to him. Traps an' free-trades in the back country, an' he's always got a nice bunch of fur. Sometimes he comes here, sometimes somewheres else, but it's always the same. Every one likes him. Trades in his fur an' spends his money where he gits it—that's him. In winter he allus wears a parka with a big wide trimmin' of white wolf hair around the hood, so's you can't hardly see his face. Guess that's where he gits his name; er mebbe it's the other way around, an' he wears it on account of his name. Wait till I go out an' see ain't the cook gittin' supper. Mebbe he's tanked up, too, the damn' loafer!"

The man departed through a door in the rear of the room, and Jean Baptiste unfolded a newspaper. Suddenly the door in the flimsy sidewall opened, and a figure stood for a moment framed in the doorway. Over the edge of his paper Jean Baptiste got one look at the face, framed in an aura of white wolf skin—the face of François! Without so much as deigning him a glance, the man's eyes swept the room and, evidently not finding what he sought, he closed the door without entering. For long minutes Jean Baptiste sat as one petrified. François Deschamps, here. François Deschamps—Le Loup Blanc—The White Wolf. Suddenly the words of François flashed into his brain. "I will kill like the wolf kills." François had not forgotten; he had even adopted the name of the wolf. He could

not hope to keep away from the police always.

It would be his grand gesture—to kill as the wolf kills. Even though he, Jean Baptiste, should never again see Céleste, might not François kill him in revenge for the thing he had done to him? It was a disquieting thought, a terrifying thought, with Le Loup Blanc here among his friends. His brain raced wildly. He would denounce François, would tell these people who thought him such a fine fellow that he was wanted by the police for a murder. He would wire the police himself that here was the man who had defied them for months! But no; François was among friends. The very man who transmitted the wire would probably notify François the moment his hand left the key, and then—"I will kill as the wolf kills!" Jean Baptiste shuddered. With an effort, he calmed to rational thinking.

When M. Cardinal had told Corporal Downey that Jean Baptiste lacked imagination, he had underrated his erstwhile employee. A half plot insinuated itself into the brain of Jean Baptiste. Was it not possible to turn François once more to account? And at the same time to set the police as definitely upon his trail as if he told them he was the man they wanted for the murder of Louis Gagnon. No one knew that he had seen Le Loup Blanc. Wait—he must think . . .

THE BACK door opened and the landlord came in, bearing a huge armful of wood which he dumped into a box, and proceeded to stoke the stove.

"Damn' whelp!" he vociferated. "Gittin' so you can't trust no one. I told the fellow when I hired him, he'd got to stay sober on train days, an' now look at him. Drunk, singin' songs fer Le Loup Blanc an' them others to laugh at! He kin sing to beat hell, too. Listen at that. Oh, well, 'tain't every one that kin sing, an I *kin* cook. Supper'll be ready d'rectly. I got the stuff on."

"This fellow, what do you call him, Le Loup—something?" drawled Jean Baptiste indifferently.

"Le Loup Blanc, yeh, that means The White Wolf, you know, in French."

"Oh, yes. Er—does he ever go down below, to Prince Albert, or Battleford, or the larger cities?"

"No, he kind of fights shy of the big towns—like me. Don't like 'em, I guess, same as I don't."

"Maybe it's the police he's fighting shy of," ventured Jean Baptiste mildly. "They sort of frown on drinking, don't they?"

The landlord laughed.

"Hell, no, onlest it's the Injuns! No, I don't figger Le Loup Blanc is dodgin' the police none. Why should he? He's square as hell; kin hev anythin' I've got. No, if he don't show up in police towns, it's like I don't, 'cause I don't like towns. No, I don't figger the police wants him none. He's a kind of a myst'ry, at that, as the feller says—but he ain't no police myst'ry. Them potatoes is burnin', I kin smell 'em. An' I put plenty of grease in the pan, too!"

The landlord disappeared in a fog of profanity which included cooks, potatoes and grease. And Jean Baptiste pondered.

The next morning the landlord appeared, red of eye and jaundiced of outlook. He sat beside Jean Baptiste as the latter breakfasted on thick pancakes and thicker bacon.

"Well, Le Loup Blanc's gone—"

"Gone?" asked Jean Baptiste. "Gone where?"

"No one knows, an' who wants to? I feel like the devil this mornin'. Ort to had sense enough to go to bed—an' me goin' on fifty! But, I ain't, an' never will hev. I'll bet I'll git to bed tonight, an' so will all the rest of the folks in town. We've all be'n up three nights runnin'. Tonight this town'll be so dead they wouldn't know it if it burnt down."

The other half of the plot leaped into the brain of Jean Baptiste as the landlord rambled on. Truly M. Cardinal knew not whereof he spoke.

He walked to the bank, still thinking.

It was a small bank—only the president, a cashier and a girl. Jean Baptiste presented his credentials and entered upon his duties. As he worked, he talked entertainingly, of this and of that. He told stories and recounted anecdotes, and brought a touch of the world into this little northern town. They liked him—the president, the cashier and the girl. And so he managed to string out his job until suppertime, and found himself still with a lot of securities to check up.

"The train goes out tomorrow. I would hate to miss it. My schedule would be all awry. Why not dine with me at the hotel?" he asked the president. "We can come over after supper and finish. Otherwise I'll be held up for two days. We won't need the others; we two can finish."

"Sure," agreed the official, welcoming the opportunity to talk with this man of the world.

At the conclusion of the meal, Jean Baptiste ordered the landlord to deliver coffee to the bank at nine o'clock. He excused himself for a moment and went to his room, returning presently with a thermos bottle which he delivered to the landlord with a flourish.

"Just put it in that and it will be good and hot," he advised. "Your weather up here would chill a pail of coffee before you could get to the bank with it."

He did not, however, deliver to the landlord the little phial of laudanum that he removed from his suitcase and slipped into his pocket, with a sardonic murmur that, "It's not every man that has brains enough to cash in on an earache."

The work proceeded, with the securities spread out on the counter, and the vault door open. The landlord delivered the coffee, and Jean Baptiste managed to slip a sleeping potion of laudanum into the president's cup. He kept on working, kept up his line of patter until the president's head sank lower and lower upon his desk. When the worthy official was finally dead to the world Jean Baptiste rifled the vault of its currency. He eyed the negotiable securities with longing eyes, but passed them up. Slipping out the door, he hurried along the deserted street to the hotel, where he stuffed the banknotes into his suitcase. Returning to the bank, he pawed some of the securities from the counter to the floor. Reaching beneath the counter, he withdrew a revolver. Deliberately walking to the door, he fired twice into the air. Then he rushed back into the bank where the befuddled president had half awakened at the sound of the shots. Grasping him by the shoulder, Jean Baptiste shook him vigorously.

"It's a holdup!" he cried. "A man came in and held a gun on me while he went through the vault. If he'd had any sense he'd have grabbed off these securities. Here's plenty of them he could have used, but he was afraid of them. He took only cash! When he went out, I grabbed a gun and followed, but just as I fired he disappeared!"

"Did you see him?" cried the president. "Did you get a good look at him?" He was wide awake now, staring from the scattered securities to the open door of the vault.

"Yes, certainly I did. I studied him while he had me backed up against the wall. He was a man of medium height—about my size, and he wore a parka with a big wide white wolfskin fringe!"

"Le Loup Blanc!" cried the president. And "Le Loup Blanc" cried the sleepy citizens who, awakened by the shots and seeing the light in the bank, began to filter in. There was talk of pursuit, but one glance at the drifting snow showed the futility of it.

The telegraph operator was roused up. The police at Prince Albert and Battleford were notified—and the chase was on.

CHAPTER X

CORPORAL DOWNEY TAKES THE TRAIL

THE ROBBERY proved to be the first of a long series of bank holdups. When the number had mounted to eleven within the year, the commissioner, in desperation, put Corporal Downey on the case. The name of

Le Loup Blanc had become anathema in the ears of every policeman. He struck, silent and sure as the animal whose namesake he was, and faded at once into the shadows of the bush.

His carousals in the frontier towns were things of the past. Never since that first robbery did Le Loup Blanc show his face in any town—except for the single purpose of robbing a bank. Nor did he fail even once in accomplishing his purpose. There was no bungling, no mistake. Many men of the police were on his trail in the outlands. He would be heard of here, and again there, always at some far outpost where he was wont to trade for his few necessities. And, because word travels slowly beyond the wires, his pursuers were always baffled.

Word would come to a river detachment that Le Loup Blanc had traded last week at such and such a post. Away would go one constable, or two. And, before they had reached their destination, word would filter into their detachment that another bank had been robbed by Le Loup Blanc, half a thousand miles from the spot where Le Loup Blanc had been seen in the flesh by a perfectly reliable factor. It was uncanny. It was impossible—but it was happening—and happening with disturbing regularity.

At his own request Downey's detail remained a secret between himself and the commissioner. In Ottawa the old corporal spent two weeks studying reports, reports of the men who, in the far outlands, were or had been on the trail of Le Loup Blanc; and reports of the men who had investigated the robberies in the frontier towns. And, in studying, he learned that Le Loup Blanc had developed a very definite technique. Only the first robbery differed from the others. Since the first time, no bank had been robbed at night. Always the robberies had taken place when there was a goodly amount of cash in the vaults—and always at the time of day most favorable for success in the particular bank and town in which it took place. The man seemed to possess an uncanny knowledge of towns and of banks, and of the personnel thereof, a fact that had bothered all the officers who had had anything to do with the case.

When he finished the last report Corporal Downey hoisted his heels to his desk top in a little room at headquarters division in Ottawa, tilted back his chair and lighted his pipe.

"That part ain't goin' to bother me one little bit," he grinned to himself, "onct I git the movements of Mr. Jean Baptiste checked up. But who in the devil is Le Loup Blanc? An' how does Jean Baptiste git his information to him? Kind of funny I'm pitted against this lad a second time. I'll git him, though, unless he's got a lot more sense than he had the last time I seen him. If we could have picked up François, I'd have had him—" the old corporal broke off abruptly, and his feet and the front legs of his chair hit the floor with a thud. "By the gods!" he muttered. "I wonder if—if François could be Le Loup Blanc? But, no. From all they said he ain't a crook. An' he ain't the kind of a man that would ever git together with Jean Baptiste, not after what he done to him."

Reaching for the phone, he called a number, and after a time learned that Jean Baptiste, bank examiner, would spend the following day in Mattewa. In the morning he took the train, and that evening called on the young man in his room.

"Ah-ha, it is my friend, the corporal!" he exclaimed, as he opened the door in answer to Downey's knock. "Come in! It is some time since we have met—almost two years, eh? And have you no word of François yet?"

Downey detected the hidden sneer in the words, and smiled.

"No word is right," he said. "I guess he got to the States, all right. I don't suppose you've ever heard anything?"

"Nothing. Is it in regard to François that I am honored by this call?"

"No. This time it's Le Loup Blanc."

"Ho-ho! Le Loup Blanc! A clever rogue, that! I would say you had your work cut out."

"Well," grinned the officer, "I've got a kind of a hunch, myself, that he ain't goin' to walk up an' ask to have the bracelets slipped on him."

"And—I can be of assistance to you?"

"I'm kind of checkin' up his record. Accordin' to the report, you was in the bank when he pulled his first robbery."

"I was. It was in the evening. The president of the bank and I had gone back to clean up some unfinished business. He fell asleep, and I was working on some securities when the door opened and Le Loup Blanc stepped into the room, covered me with a pistol, went to the vault and helped himself to the cash." He paused to smile. "He's evidently a man who understands little of business. The whole counter was littered with negotiable securities whose value was much greater than the amount of loot he got."

"Vault was open, was it?"

"Yes, I had taken the securities from it and expected to return them."

"Did he come in the front door, or the back?"

"The front door."

"Funny it wasn't locked, ain't it?"

"The door was provided with a spring lock. The hotel keeper brought us coffee about nine o'clock, and when he went out he must have failed to close it tight enough."

"Did you git a good look at his face—this Le Loup Blanc?"

"No. His whole face was surrounded by a big ruff of white wolfskin that edged his parka hood, and beside that he had tied a red handkerchief about the lower half of it."

"Couldn't identify him if you was to see him again?"

"I'm afraid not. But there are plenty who can—the hotel keeper and half the citizens of the town. He was known to all of them. They were all very much surprised to think that he would commit a robbery."

"An' he went out the same way he come, I s'pose? An' what did you do then?"

"Yes, he went out the front door, backed out, keeping me covered. He closed the door behind him, and I grabbed a pistol from beneath the counter and rushed out the door. It was snowing and blowing, but I thought I caught sight of a dim figure, and I fired twice, and the figure disappeared. Then I rushed back into the bank and roused the president, who was already half awake at the sound of the shots, and told him of what had happened. When I described the man he unhesitatingly said it was Le Loup Blanc. So did the other citizens who came in a short time later to see what the shooting was about. They searched for tracks, but it was no use the way it was snowing and blowing. It would be a great thing if you could get Le Loup Blanc. The bankers in all the outside towns are getting worried, and there has been some talk of raising the insurance rate."

"I'll git him," said Downey, rising and placing his hand upon the knob of the door. "It may take time—but I'll git him."

Jean Baptiste smiled.

"No doubt of that, I am sure. But you must remember, Corporal, that Le Loup Blanc is a much smarter man than François."

"Maybe, maybe," admitted Downey, ignoring the jibe. "But one of the things I've learnt in policin' is that it ain't always the smart ones that git away. I'll be goin', now. I'm obliged to you."

"Don't mention it. And, if you should ever want me, for a witness or anything, you can easily reach me through the department."

"Oh, I won't have no trouble locatin' you—when I want you," answered the old corporal dryly. "Good night."

CHAPTER XI

A PHOTOGRAPH

BACK in Ottawa Corporal Downey visited the newspaper offices and was not long in finding what he sought.

"Thought I remembered seein' some

pictures," he muttered, as he spread before him a year old paper that had featured the first holdup. Here they were—photographs of the little bank, of the president who had slept through the robbery and of the bank examiner who had fired at the retreating robber. There was also a staff artist's depiction of Le Loup Blanc, drawn from Jean Baptiste's description—a parka clad figure with a great ruff of white wolfskin surrounding a face, the lower half of which was masked.

The photographer was summoned, and the artist, and when Corporal Downey left the building he carried with him a photograph of the face of Jean Baptiste Deschamps, framed in a ruff of white wolfskin. Then he took the train for the little town of the first robbery and interviewed the hotel keeper. He found that worthy not disinclined to talk. In fact, he boasted with pride of his acquaintance with the notorious Le Loup Blanc.

"Hell, yes! I know him well, well's any one, I guess. That is, I did, till he got to holdin' up banks."

"How long had you known him?"

" 'Bout a year, ever sence he first got to comin' here. Use' to come in with a bunch of fur an' put up here a couple of days or so, an' then beat it."

"Where did he live?"

"Don't know—don't think any one knows. He'd jest come an' go."

"Did he ever say anything about himself, what his name was, or where he came from? Ever mention his people?"

"Nope. We've often spoke of that. Never told no one nothin' about nothin'."

"What sort of a fellow was he? About how old?"

"W-e-el, I'd say mebbe twenty-four, twenty-five, somewheres along there. He was a damn' good feller. Spent his money like a prince. Half the town'd git tight when he come in."

"Know this man?" Corporal Downey thrust the photograph into the man's hand.

"Hell, yes! It's him! It's him right down to a gnat's hine leg. Kind of more sober-like, er solemn around the mouth an' eyes than what he was; but that's him, all right—the way he'd look if he wasn't laughin'. But it looks like he'd ort to know'd more'n to git his picture tooken, an' him in the business he's in!"

"When was the last time you seen him?"

"Right here in this hotel. It was the night before the holdup. He'd be'n in town, that was the third night, an' he pulled out along about three er four o'clock in the mornin'. Must of hung around in the brush till that night an' then slipped in an' held up the bank."

"Are you the man who carried the coffee to the bank?"

"That's me. Left here with it at 9:00, like the examiner ordered it, an' was back in ten minutes."

"You entered the bank by the front door?"

"Yup."

"Do you remember whether or not it was locked?"

"Yup. It was. I tried the door, an' then pounded on it, an' Mr. Emery, the president, he come an' opened it hisself an' let me in."

"Who was in the bank at the time?"

"Jest him an' the examiner. They was workin' late so's the examiner could make the train in the mornin'."

"Do you remember whether or not you closed the door tight after you?"

"Well, I think I did. Mebbe not, though. It was snowin' an' blowin' an' they might of some snow got in between it an' the sill that helt it from shuttin' tight. Then the lock wouldn't ketch. It's got one of these here patent locks."

"What time did this bank examiner get in town?"

"He come in on the train 'long about 4:30. Anyways, I remember it was dark a'ready. She's due at noon, but she was late that day on account it was snowin' an' blowin' like hell. She was shovin' a plow, an' she ain't got much power nohow, on account she leaks like an old teakittle, an' they can't hold no steam in her. Looks like if they was goin' to railroad they'd git 'em an ingyne, instead of that

rattlin' of old junk they've got. She ain't never be'n right plumb on time but onct, an' that's when her train got off the track an' she run in light."

"Was Le Loup Blanc in town when he came in?"

"Yup. Him an' a bunch of the boys was in that room over there doin' a little private drinkin', singin' songs an' tellin' stories an' the like. I remember partic'lar, 'cause the cook got drunk, an' I had to stay sober till after supper to do the cookin'."

"Did the examiner meet Le Loup Blanc? Did he see him?"

"I can't say fer sure if he seen him. I hed to be in the kitchen part of the time. But I don't think he did. They was in the other room with the door shut, an' they didn't come in to eat till after he'd et an' went to bed. I told him all about Le Loup Blanc, hed to kind of explain the racket they made what with their laughin' an' singin'. An' I asked him didn't he want to come along an' h'ist a few—but he claimed he didn't drink nothin'. It was all right with me. I'm lib'ral. I claim if a man don't want to drink, you hadn't ort to hold it agin him. I wouldn't damn a man off fer that, leastways till I know'd what ailed him. Mebbe it's his stummick."

"You say you told him all about Le Loup Blanc? Described him—wolfskin parka hood an' all?"

"Yup. They wasn't nothin' else to talk about."

"Did he seem interested?"

"Sure, he did. Asked a lot of questions about him. They's one thing he asked that I didn't pay no heed to at the time, but it's seemed kind of funny, since Le Loup Blanc turned out to be a holdup, an' I hed time to kind of study on it. He asks me if Le Loup Blanc ever went down to the bigger towns, Prince Albert an' Battleford. An' when I told him no, he says mebbe it's because he's fightin' shy of the police. But I told him it wasn't that—you see, they hadn't be'n no Le Loup Blanc holdups up to then. I told him it was jest like me; he didn't like towns."

IT WAS two weeks before Corporal Downey showed up at headquarters. When he did he was summoned directly into the office of the commissioner.

"There was another Le Loup Blanc holdup last night," said that dignitary, knitting his brow and thrumming the top of his big table nervously.

"Yump," said Downey. "So I seen by the papers."

"Have you made any progress at all?"

"Yes, quite a bit. Expect they'll be two, three more of 'em before I clamp down on my man. Want a report?"

"No, no Downey, no formal report—not from you." The commissioner paused and grinned into the face of his most trusted officer. "I've been looking over reports on him for a year. What I want is the man—not a report."

Corporal Downey returned the grin.

"I jest got a hunch that there ain't never goin' to be any one tried an' convicted fer these here Le Loup Blanc holdups."

The commissioner looked aghast.

"What the hell? And you say there will be two or three more of these robberies. These Le Loup Blanc losses are running up into big money."

He reached for a pigeonhole, but Downey stayed him with a gesture.

"Yump. I can give you the exact amount to a dollar. We won't worry about that. My job's jest as much to git back the loot, as it is to git the man—"

"You mean you know where it is?"

"Nope, but I will know. I know that there ain't enough of it be'n spent to worry no one. An', by the way, I want the best shadow man you've got. I want him now—an' I'll turn him back when I'm through with him."

"See the superintendent."

"I know the man I want," said the old corporal, rising. "An' I'll say right here, sir, that—how is it Shakespeare puts it—

" 'There are more things in heaven and earth,
Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' "

"*Our* philosophy, Downey! Our philosophy!"

"You read the folio, Commissioner; me, I read the quarto."

The commissioner's eyes twinkled.

"Shakespeare was a wise man, Downey, but he wasn't a policeman."

"Folks don't hold that against him. He got off a good one, now an' then, even if he wasn't," said the corporal. "Let me slip you a little earful. There's a Le Loup Blanc, all right, an' I'm goin' to bring him in—but when we've got him, we're goin' to turn him loose."

"Get out of here!" laughed the commissioner. "I'm a busy man."

In the office of the superintendent Downey paused.

"I'll be wantin' Sergeant Coglin fer a couple of weeks or so."

The superintendent smiled.

"Some Sherlock Holmes stuff?"

"Wait an' see," answered Downey.

In the little room, ten minutes later, Downey cocked his heels on to his desk top and eyed the young man in civilian clothing who faced him.

"Set down an' smoke up," he invited, lighting his own pipe and tossing the match to the floor. "Did you ever happen to see a bank examiner by the name of Jean Baptiste Descamps."

"No, sir—"

"Don't 'sir' me; you rank me."

The man grinned.

"No one ranks you in the Service," he said. "You spoke of one Jean Baptiste Deschamps? A bank examiner, the one, most likely, that was held up at the time of the first robbery of Le Loup Blanc?"

"Yeh, that's him. Keep fairly well posted, don't you?"

"Why not? I might know him if I saw him. I have seen his picture."

"Here it is, if you ain't," said Downey, tossing a photograph on to the desk.

The man picked it up and gave a start.

"Le Loup Blanc!" he exclaimed.

"Yeh," drawled the corporal. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—"

"My name is George," corrected the sergeant.

"So it is," said Downey. "I'd fergot. Anyways, you git on him, an' you tail him from now on. He'll go to Montreal, or Quebec, or maybe Vancouver, Winnipeg, or Halifax. He'll go somewheres where a man can invest money. Find out who he invests with—an' under what name. Then come back."

"All right, sir. And—my reports?"

"There won't be none—till you come in."

The sergeant left, and Corporal Downey eyed the reports spread out on his desk.

"There ain't be'n a damn' robbery committed except in a bank that he's examined within three or four days, an' his reports, an' the hotel registers shows that he wasn't never more than a day away from any job that was pulled. Now that could work two ways—either he was in close touch with the robber, or he was the robber. An' I think I know which. Guess I'll jest go out on the trail of Le Loup Blanc."

CHAPTER XII

FRANÇOIS

AS CORPORAL DOWNEY had studied the reports of the robberies, so had he studied the reports of the police of the outlying detachments who had acted upon the tips of such factors and traders as had seen Le Loup Blanc in the far outlands.

Then he started out. The various posts at which Le Loup Blanc had traded since the first bank robbery need not be here recorded. Suffice it to say that they encompassed a distance of some seven hundred miles in east and west extent, and were many miles north of the railways.

Suffice it also to say that, acting upon certain deductions, Corporal Downey struck due northward from Prince Albert. At Stanley Mission, north of Lac LaRonge, an Indian came in to trade. He traded

many fine furs. It was a fine hunt, said McLaury, the trader. Yes, agreed the Indian—a fine hunt. And Corporal Downey, sitting in the corner of the trading room, thought to himself—a fine hunt. The Indian needed much salt pork. He needed much flour and salt and sugar and tea. He also needed some .30-30 cartridges. Corporal Downey had looked at the Indian's gun when he came in. It was an H. B. trade gun. The Indian also needed ammunition for the trade gun. When the Indian left the post, the officer trailed him.

The course taken by Corporal Downey for Lac LaRonge was not at all a matter of hazard. Knowing the North as Downey knew it, and having the reports for a year of the men who had followed Le Loup Blanc—or attempted to follow him—Downey gave his quarry credit for as much knowledge of the North as he himself possessed. He also gave the man credit for having as much acumen as he himself had—which, if you knew Corporal Downey, was giving away a lot.

Therefore he hit for Lac LaRonge, and therefore he followed the Indian who traded many fine furs for much pork and sugar and tea—and .30-30 caliber cartridges. No man knew better than Downey that a stern chase is a long chase, and he set out to out-guess Le Loup Blanc in the bush, rather than to trail him through hundreds of miles of bush.

The Indian camped on the first night, and the second, and the third. On the third day Downey noticed that the man was taking slightly longer steps than he had been. Following in his snowshoe trail, it was easy to check this. The old corporal noted it within a half hour of starting, yet he cursed himself roundly. Deliberately, he turned about and retraced his tracks to the camp of the night before. From behind an outcropping rock he saw a man strapping supplies into a pack sack. Circling to bring himself nearer, he caught out of the tail of his eye another glimpse of the man. He was kneeling behind a low spruce with a rifle on him. And beyond the muzzle of the rifle he had a glimpse of a great ruff of white wolf fur. Very deliberately Downey sat down and, removing a snow shoe, regarded it with evident concern. Without glancing at the man, he lighted his pipe and smoked slowly, blowing the blue smoke into the air. He was in a thick patch of aspens whose bare limbs cast shadows on the snow. Producing rawhide, Downey fell to work on his snowshoe. It began to snow—gently. It was nearly noon before he once more glanced toward the stunted spruce. The man was gone. Grinning, Downey leisurely struck out on his trail. Shortly after dark he crept close up on a camp. The man was preparing a meal. His little fire flashed brightly against the dark screen of spruce and threw grotesque shadows. The man filled his teapot with snow—refilled it, and refilled it again. Then he dropped in the tea. Into his frying pan he placed two slices of salt pork, sniffing hungrily as the savory odor reached his nostrils.

"It's all up," said Downey from the shadows.

Instantly the man elevated his hands to the height of his head and waited. Downey walked to the fire. He had not drawn off his mittens. The service revolver was in its holster, concealed by the skirt of his coat. He carried no rifle.

"You've got guts," said the man, a slow grin overspreading his features.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Downey, seating himself beside the fire. "You could have killed me back there in the aspens."

The man stared in astonishment.

"You know that?"

"Sure. I made a bad play. Was in too much of a hurry. Run on to you before you'd got a chance to move your stuff. Knew you had a rifle, an' tried to git closer. Why in hell didn't you kill me? I wouldn't have had a chance."

The other smiled.

"It would have been a cowardly trick, the act of a dog, not the act of Le Loup Blanc."

"You're right," said Downey, grinning. "If I thought you'd done it I'd of killed you when you was tyin' up the stuff. You shouldn't never turn your back on the trail."

Le Loup Blanc offered his hand. Corporal Downey grasped it and grasped it with a vigor that surprised the younger man.

"At least," said Le Loup Blanc, "I surrender to a good sportsman."

He extended his two hands, held closely together. Downey glanced at them and, fumbling in his pocket—produced his pipe.

"Better throw in a couple of strips more of pork, son," he advised. "I'm hungry."

"But—am I not under arrest?"

"Sure. Let's eat. We can talk later."

AFTER a supper of pork and tea the two smoked up. Le Loup Blanc was the first to break the silence.

"I've hit a long trail today. I wanted to be sure and meet the Injun. I'm sleepy. Better slip the irons on me. In the morning I'll go along."

Corporal Downey grinned.

"Don't know as I ever seen a man so hell bent on gittin' chained up," he observed. "What's the idea—afraid you'll stampede an' git lost?"

The face of Le Loup Blanc flushed.

"What are you doing with me, playing as a cat does with a mouse? I know you are of the Mounted Police, and I know that you know who I am. Why not have it over with and be damned to you?"

"Do you realize what you're up against—back there?"

"But—certainly! The robbery of many banks. I am no fool. Years enough in prison to last me the rest of my life. It is not pleasant, but only a dog whines."

Corporal Downey nodded and slowly puffed at his pipe.

"Um-hum. What have you done with the loot, son?" he asked. "Gittin' that back might shorten the sentences quite a bit."

The younger man looked into the kindly face of the old corporal and, meeting the keen gaze of the gray eyes, spoke straight from the heart:

"I don't know you, except as a policeman—and a damned good one, because you've run me down where the others have failed for a year. You're a square one, too. You could have killed me, but that score cancels. I want to tell you right here—man to man—that I never robbed a bank in my life. You'll laugh—the judge will laugh—the jury will laugh—the public press will laugh—and the people will laugh. I'll be convicted. But it's true. I never robbed a bank in my life. So far as I'm concerned, there is no loot!"

"I know it's true," said Corporal Downey. "That's why I had so much fun chasin' you."

The other was staring in open mouthed astonishment.

"You know it's true? Then why in the devil have you arrested me?"

"Had to. Need you down below. An' besides, if I hadn't, how'd I know that some of them damn' fool rookies that's chasin' you mightn't sneak up an' shoot you?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that with you in jail—an' no one knowin' it but me an' you—it's goin' to be easy to pick up the party that's pullin' this stuff an' passin' it over on to you."

"Do you really mean that you believe I'm innocent?" The younger man's face expressed disbelief.

"Sure. I know damn' well you are. With you in the jug, it's goin' to be the easiest thing in the world to git the party that's be'n tradin' on your name. Then, son, you can come out an' tell 'em who you are. You must be gittin' kind of tired of this White Wolf stuff by now."

"No man knows who I am. No man will ever know!"

Corporal Downey grinned.

"Don't kid yourself, François. know, an' so does one other—the one that's playin' your double, the only one

in the world that could play your double—Jean Baptiste." The younger man stared, wide eyed, as Downey continued, "I know you ain't guilty, an' I know you ain't guilty of killin' Louis Gagnon. If you'd of stuck around I could of proved it. I know who's robbin' these banks an' I know who killed Louis Gagnon, an' I can prove it now. Listen, François, back there in the village there's a girl named Céleste. She knows you didn't kill Louis Gagnon. She don't know who did. I do."

The sudden tears that sprang into François's eyes changed to a hard glitter as Corporal Downey told of the sayings and doings of Jean Baptiste.

"I knew it was Jean Baptiste, of course. I knew it all the time," he faltered. "But what could I do? Always, it seemed to me, the evidence was against me. I had to run."

CHAPTER XIII

JEAN BAPTISTE

TWO WEEKS later a man was lodged in the Ottawa jail, very secretly. Only a few knew that he was François Deschamps, wanted for the murder of Louis Gagnon; alias Le Loup Blanc, wanted for the robbery of many banks.

Up North, the police were still hunting for the Le Loup Blanc.

A day or two later a news story broke graphically detailing a battle between two mounted policemen and Le Loup Blanc in the bush near a certain town whose bank he had undoubtedly planned to rob. The news story stated that a dozen policemen had been rushed to the scene and that the capture of Le Loup Blanc was only a matter of days.

"That ought to hustle him up on his next job," grinned Corporal Downey, as he carefully checked the copy for release. "He knows damn' well that with Le Loup Blanc pinched, his gravy is spilt. He'll make one more play fer a cleanup."

He sent for Sergeant Coglin.

"What you got?" he asked.

The sergeant laid a typed report upon the desk, and Downey scanned it eagerly.

"H-u-m," he drawled, "so he's Monsieur Georges La Franier in high finance, is he? An' his brokers is Jones an' Brown? Well, I hope he's done good enough with his investments to pay his commissions. There's a lot of bankers that would hate to have their insurance rates raised."

The news story brought the results that Corporal Downey had anticipated. He himself trailed Jean Deschamps for a week. On the day, and in the town of the holdup, he watched the proceeding from across the street. He was in a hardware store—ostensibly a traveling salesman.

That evening, at eight o'clock, in a hotel room in the next town, he knocked upon Jean Baptiste's door. He was then in the uniform of a corporal of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The door opened, and Downey stepped into the room.

"Heard the news? he asked, as the other motioned him to a seat. "Another bank robbery—fifteen miles up the line."

"Well, well, it's getting almost to be a joke." Jean Baptiste permitted himself a supercilious smile.

"Yeh," agreed Downey sourly, "a hell of a joke. An' who do you figure the joke's on?"

"Well," said Jean Baptiste, "since you ask me, I should say—on the police. To the banker's I rather fancy it has gone past the bounds of a joke."

"Yeh. That's what I was thinkin'. Now, who in hell do you figure done this job?"

"Why, Le Loup Blanc, of course! Who else?"

"Might of," admitted the corporal. "Except we've had him locked up in Ottawa fer the last three, four weeks."

"What do you mean—locked up?"

"Why, we got a kind of a quaint way, in the police, of sayin' a man's locked up when he's in jail. No, I wouldn't try that—"

Jean Baptiste's hand paused before it reached his hip, as his eyes stared into the muzzle of Corporal Downey's service revolver.

"Might's well set down," suggested the corporal, as he moved over and slipped the automatic pistol from the other's hip pocket.

Jean Baptiste summoned a wan smile.

"I don't suppose there's any chance to —to speak to you in private?"

"Why, yes, I guess so. I'm about as private right now as I ever git."

"How about a cut?"

"A—which?"

"A cut-in on the haul. It's in there—" he indicated a suitcase under the bed.

"Yeh, I figured that's where it would be."

"Of course, I know you've got me with the goods."

"Yeh?"

"Yes. And—well—how about fifty-fifty?"

"Meanin'?"

"Why, meaning half for you and half for me?"

"On all the stuff, the whole eleven or twelve jobs?"

Jean Baptiste smiled.

"Oh, no. That money has been spent long ago."

"What d'you mean—spent, Monsieur Georges La Franier? Jones an' Brown don't say it's spent."

For the first time Jean Baptiste lost his poise.

"All right, all right, take half of all. Let's have done! You crook!"

Corporal Downey grinned as he opened a suitcase and disclosed many compact packages of banknotes—and a parka with a wide ruff of white wolfskin about the hood.

"You're pretty good, at that," he admitted. "I wouldn't of thought it was in you. But there's nothin' doin'. You an' me's goin' back to Ottawa. An' if it wasn't fer one little technicality of the law, you'd have to serve about two hundred years in prison—"

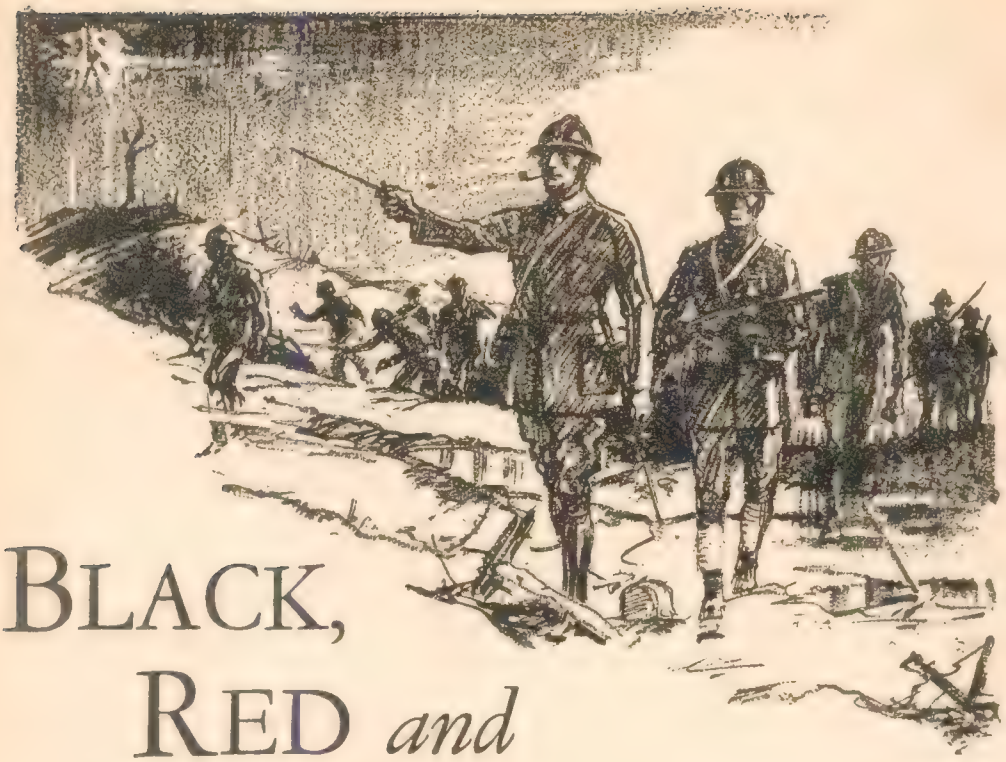
"What is that?" asked the man eagerly, his eyes lighting. "That technicality?"

"Well," replied the old corporal, "the trouble is, you've got to hang fer killin' Louis Gagnon."

Back in the village the old ones are nodding their heads.

"A wedding and a hanging—all in one week! *Voià!*

"Have we not always said that there must be one black sheep in each generation of Deschamps?"



BLACK, RED *and* WHITE

A Story of the Warriors from Senegal

By GEORGES SURDEZ

BETWEEN the damp walls of a trench cleft deep in the flank of the slope, human moles basked in the warm sunshine. Unwilling to take shelter in the moist holes they inhabited, they loitered near the entrances of the dugouts, dumb with beatific relaxation, content that Death for the moment was engaged elsewhere.

Bernard, sergeant in the Third Company, watched the groups scattered along the trench. These men wore the uniform of France, appeared exactly like the rest until under the battered helmets of blued steel could be discerned the coarse, scantily bearded faces of negroes. They were privates of a Tirailleurs regiment, holding in that early spring of 1917 the French line near the Chemin des Dames.

Sentries were at the loopholes, watching the sloping ground separating the lines, staring, hour after hour, at the same desolate panorama of shell pits, rusted, twisted wire and lifeless bodies. In the east, near Craonnelle, batteries pounded into the limpid sky. A German machine gun rattled intermittently, with its oddly alert, staccato bursts.

In the center of one of the groups, Private M'Barick Phal was speaking. Bernard frowned. He did not like Phal. The man was from one of the communities of Senegal which have the right of vote; and consequently he believed himself a politician and an orator. Having served in other regiments, he was tainted by the fast spreading discouragement.

Yet, physically, Phal was a fine soldier —tall, heavy, muscular, the guileless smile of a child often lighting his broad, sooty face. He had seen Verdun, and wore on his coat the ribbons of two decorations. He was an expert automatic rifleman, detailed to Bernard's unit especially to bolster the morale of the outfit. He performed his job well, but his socialistic and pacifist speeches were sapping the spirit of his comrades.

The sergeant rose and went toward the group. He realized soon that he could not interfere justly: Phal was speaking in Ouolof dialect and the white non-com could not accuse him of defeatism without understanding what he said. The negroes listened intently, with occasional grunts of approval, or a clear, sharp note of protest.

Yet, Bernard felt, from the few words in French that enameled the clicking, hissing syllables of the African tongue, that Phal was repeating the old arguments: They were Africans, not concerned in white men's quarrels. This feeling had been awakened and fostered by agents of the enemy among Colonial units.

Phal was making an impression. In August, 1914, the blacks had answered the call to colors proudly, with enthusiasm, eager to share the dangers and glories of European war. But now, after thirty-odd months of fighting, they were growing weary of the task, fatigued physically and morally.

Bernard himself knew days when he dreaded the future; the thought of heroism no longer fascinated. He had beheld some near mutinies, had heard of whole regiments of white troops refusing duty. The sole consolation was the belief that, on the opposite side, the gray men from over the Rhine were not feeling much better.

"If that's a speech against the army you're making," he said at last, "you better quit. That sort of business don't help, Phal—can only get you into trouble."

"Sure, sure—" Phal grinned bitterly— "tell the truth and get shot for it." He spoke good French, having attended school in St. Louis du Senegal. "Nobody blames you, Sergeant. You're a victim as much as we are."

"Victim or not, I tell you to cut it out."

"All right," Phal agreed.

He seemed about to say more, when an officer appeared around a corner in the trench. He was a lieutenant, recognizable by the elegant cut of his greatcoat and the crossed swords on the front of his trench helmet. He was thin, young, and smiled nervously. Elbowing his way through the privates who had risen at his approach, he halted before Bernard.

"I want a volunteer," he announced.

Three months before, this call would have brought many answers. Now, the men stood quietly, as if they had not understood. A few smiled derisively.

"What for?" some one asked.

"It is believed that the Boches have established a listening post in one of the big shell craters not far from your lines. Somebody must go and make sure."

He looked eagerly from face to face; but even Bernard avoided his glance. All was quiet out front, but machine guns were ready. Moreover, if the hole was occupied, the inquiring soul who pushed his head over its edge would not come back.

"*Bon Dieu!*" the lieutenant snapped impatiently. "I was told you were a good regiment." He waited, then added coaxingly, "Come on, the War Cross to the fellow who goes—the Military Medal if the man already has the Cross."

THE PRIVATES stared into space sullenly. There were many men wearing decorations hung to rot on the wires outside. Thinking that perhaps the blacks had not understood him, the officer simplified his

language to a bizarre pidgin French, which brought laughter. Bernard, temporarily in charge, could not volunteer and leave his men without a white chief. He explained this to the staff man.

"Where are your officers?"

"Captain's gone on leave," Bernard said. "The others are in the second line, resting. We had a nasty night up here."

"I'll find one of them—if only to compliment him on the spirit prevailing in this sector."

Bernard flushed, angered as much by the tone as by the faint smile of scorn which accompanied the sarcasm. But before he could reply, he was shoved aside by a newcomer.

"I'll listen to your compliments, Lieutenant," Captain Canovy drawled.

As he spoke, the captain commanding the Third Company motioned all aside save the lieutenant. Bernard led the men down the trench forty or fifty feet and turned to watch the two officers.

Canovy was a tall, slender man of thirty-three, grave of face and manner. His eyes, grayish green, pierced his weather beaten cheeks with stabs of cool light; the gaunt bony face was prolonged by a short black beard; the lips were finely modeled, sensitive. Among the Tirailleurs, he was not merely an officer, he was a symbol.

No one quite knew what he had been before the war—some said a stone cutter. He had started as a private; emergency had revealed his native ability to lead, a personal magnetism combined with keen intelligence. Much of the discouragement this morning had been caused by the belief that he had gone on leave.

Bernard felt that all shared his present uneasiness. Canovy would not be pleased to learn his men had refused to supply a volunteer. But when he came toward them, he was smiling. He drew a cigaret from a leather holder, asked for a match. Then he spoke in a quiet, conversational voice.

"That's a pretty yarn I had to hear, lads. Between ourselves, you were not wholly to blame. One of your own officers should have been sent to ask you. That young man is from the staff and doesn't know how, you see."

The blacks grinned with understanding and relief.

"I'll go, Captain," said Koulibali, a Bambara.

One having taken the lead, all raised their hands save Phal.

Canovy shook his head. Slowly, he removed his greatcoat, removed papers from the inside pocket of his tunic, stripped the collar of regimental number and insignia.

"Here, Bernard, take care of this stuff. No need taking information to them. Thou, Koulibali, give me a couple of hand grenades."

The sergeant knew better than to protest. Canovy would once more preach by example, the most efficient method to employ with African blacks. He placed the grenades in his pockets, tightened the chin strap of the helmet snugly about his jaws.

"Know where that hole is, Sergeant?"

"Up the slope to the left."

Bernard led him to a loophole, indicated the emplacement as well as possible.

"I'll be hidden most of the way—that's good."

Canovy reached upward with long arms, slid over the top of the trench and was soon under the wires. Men crowded to the loopholes to watch him. To those in the French lines, the crawling man was plainly visible. The staff officer bared his head, wiped his face with a fine linen handkerchief.

A machine gun on the other side opened fire, perhaps instinctively or because Canovy had been seen. As always, the first burst brought other guns into action. From that moment, and for several minutes following, the captain was the central figure in the lives of many hundred men; for word had spread quickly on both sides that some one was out front—alive.

Canovy reached the shell crater, tossed in his grenades. He vanished inside, reappeared on the rim within a few seconds, crawled down the slope. Bullets smacked the ground about him. The Germans were

trying to reach him with rifle grenades; the slow, methodical fire of snipers could be distinguished through the steady crackle of machine guns.

But Canovy, who had survived twenty bayonet attacks, had not reached his hour. Bruskly, as suddenly as he had left, he was standing in the trench, unhurt, laughing.

"False alarm," he informed the staff lieutenant. "Empty. And I may point out that it was not very intelligent to send a man in broad daylight when nothing pressed."

He took his papers from Bernard, slipped the greatcoat over the muddied uniform. The lieutenant saluted and left without another word.

"By the way, Sergeant," Canovy went on casually, "the ground before a Tirailleurs regiment belongs to it right up to the German wires. After the excitement dies down, have that hole occupied. A good place for a machine rifle." He looked steadily at Phal.

"I'll go, Captain," the big negro replied hastily.

"Fine. I'll be back in six days. Good luck, lads."

APRIL 16th, 1917.

In the gray fog, no longer night and not yet day, the Tirailleurs were waiting for the signal to attack. From midnight a terrific bombardment had ploughed into the German positions. Toward morning it had dwindled somewhat, but the air still vibrated like an insane drum.

Bernard waited with his men in a narrow communication trench. He was lost in a horde of negroes, grinning, quivering fellows who clutched their rifles tightly, and whose voices, in the short lulls of the firing, chattered in piercing phrases.

Here, awaiting the dreaded moment, was the whole of West Africa, ready to go forward for France. These blacks were presumably volunteers, nicknamed by skeptical troopers "Involuntary Volunteers". From Niger to Congo, white administrators had asked the village chiefs for recruits, and men had been supplied in thousands, sent to France, drilled, given fine weapons and taught to kill in a most civilized manner.

A certain proportion was made up of Ouolofs, from Senegal. These were the men sprung from stock longest under French rule and which gave the name to the units—Senegalese Tirailleurs. But there were others. Serrers and Akkos from Galam and Casamacia; tall, lithe Tukuleurs from the Western Soudan, broad shouldered, lean shanked warriors of chocolate hue; Bambaras of the Niger Loop, with the tribal marks scarring their cheeks, sons of Samory's riders.

Mingled with them was a horde of indiscriminate origins, Gabonese, Congolese. Tattooed Abbeys, Atsheys, Baouleys from the banks of the Ivory Coast's rivers; Senoufos from the interior, frightened eyes rolling in their brutal faces, wide open mouths in which gleamed the pointed teeth of cannibal breeds.

Grenades and knives had been distributed. The usual bracer, a few swallows of alcohol that brought a false sense of comfortable warmth in the pit of men's stomachs, had been doled out. Those who were forbidden by their religion to drink liquor surrendered their share to less prejudiced comrades.

Phal, educated compared to the rest, looked at his brothers in race with visible amusement.

"Defenders of righteousness, Sergeant —all of them!"

"They have more guts than you, Phal."

"I'm not afraid—it's unjust." The big Senegalese laughed. "The fools! Savages and Bambaras who are satisfied as long as they can wear a uniform. What will they get out of this?"

Canovy's voice interrupted him. The captain was standing in the open, above the trench, and calling his company together. He was one of the old fashioned type, who believed in encouraging his men by voice and gesture before attack.

"I don't have to ask you to fight well," he said, his words cutting clearly through the din. "I know you. But I wish to tell

you again that while we white men are only doing our duty as men in kicking the enemy from our homes, you are doing far more. Your homes were in no danger. Yet, true to your traditions, you stick to your friends, the French. In the name of my country, I thank you all."

Bernard saw the effect of this speech in the men's faces, and wondered. Not many knew French sufficiently well to understand fully, but they appeared filled with new determination, with eagerness. Just a few words, from a white chief, from a real white man.

"Pass the word along—ready for attack."

The fateful phrase was transmitted from one man to the next. All were now very quiet.

"Fix bayonets!"

The long blades tipped the rifles, glistened in the new light. It was 6:01, and at 6:02 the attacking troops were to start. Thirty seconds later came the final warning, fleeting from lips to lips.

"Watch for the signal of attack!"

Canovy glanced at his watch. He was unarmed save for a light stick held beneath one arm, and was smoking a pipe. His revolver was in the holster at his belt. Where other officers, fearing snipers who picked off leaders, muddied their stripes so that they would not be identified, Canovy was dressed with greater care than usual and wore his decorations pinned on his greatcoat. He was not vain or foolish, simply knew that he commanded primitive men to whom outward show meant much, that he must at all times personify the chief, authority.

"Let's go," he said at last.

The Third Company filed through the lanes cut in the wires, spread out until it established contact with other units, and advanced in good order. Explosions bloomed in rapid flickers in the field ahead. Five yards in front of his men walked Canovy, cane in hand.

From time to time, a black called out.

"*Ayesha Avaye!*" cried the Ouolofs. "Come on!"

"*Farha! Farha! Farha!*" The Bambara cry, which resounded so often on Soudanese battlefields, shrilled through the uproar. "Kill! Kill! Kill!"

DUSK.

The survivors of the attack were back in the trenches from which they had launched their onslaught. The Third Company was reduced to seventy-eight men. Rumors were current that other units had been completely wiped out. The enemy's reserves, thrown in at the crucial moment when victory had been in sight, had turned the tide. Of Bernard's men, only sixteen were left. A lieutenant commanded the company, for Captain Canovy was out front—dead.

The men huddled under the dripping rain. Phal, surrounded by his usual listeners, spoke steadily, angrily. Bernard caught the word socialist, spoken in French because there existed no native equivalent. The machine rifleman, embittered by defeat, switched to the language of the sergeant, when he saw Bernard listening.

"We should be like the Russians—reds. They have thrown down their idols. We are so much black meat to save their precious bodies. Why be fools? Our white comrades, those who are neither rich nor officers, wish the slaughter to end. Should we be greater fools than they?"

"I'll make charges and have you shot," Bernard warned him.

"Do it." Phal smiled defiantly, his black face sulky. "I'd sooner end for telling my comrades the truth than shot for capitalists."

Bernard shrugged wearily. At the first occasion, he would report Phal to the lieutenant, and wash his hands of the affair. Meanwhile, what would be the use of an altercation? He neared another group, clustered about Koulibali, the Bambara.

"The captain is out front," the private was saying, in French. Before the war, he had been in the army, had followed Gouraud in Mauritania and Morocco. He now expressed himself in the tongue of his chiefs, for not all listening knew his

Dyoula dialect. "I saw him drop his cane and put one hand to his neck. I ran to him. He fell on his hands and knees, and the helmet dropped from his head. The bullets were hitting all around. The captain raised his face and he knew me. He tried to talk and he looked sick. I was going to pick him up to carry away. Then he was hit again and bled to death. He died with his eyes open—looking at me."

He glanced up at Bernard and broke off abruptly. When he resumed speaking, it was in a dialect unknown to the white man. The sergeant left.

After night had fallen completely, Koulibali came down into his dugout. Behind him crowded half a dozen blacks of his own tribe.

"What do you wish?" Bernard asked.

"We talked among ourselves. We can't leave the captain out there."

"What does it matter where he is?" Bernard asked. "He's dead."

Koulibali appeared to be struggling with an idea difficult to express. His sloping forehead wrinkled, the nose spread wider above the thick lips.

"We go get him. Lieutenant let us go?"

"Ask him. I don't think he will."

"He doesn't like us blacks. You're white. He listens."

"All right," Bernard consented at last.

He called on the lieutenant, who was lying on a heap of stinking straw ten feet below ground. The man was from a French regiment, scorned the blacks; furthermore, he was suffering from a wound in the thigh.

"They want to get the captain's body back?" he said, puzzled, after Bernard stopped speaking. "Why?"

"To bury him," Koulibali replied.

"There are many to bury out there," the officer said gruffly.

"Captain was our chief. He belongs to us."

"The Germans will hear you, and you'll get your mugs smashed."

"We make no noise, Lieutenant," Koulibali promised.

The officer lighted a cigaret. The flare of the match revealed his blood stained hands and his muddy face against the sweating side of the hole.

"You feel you must bring him back?"

"Yes, Lieutenant. Blacks don't leave white men."

"I suppose it would be some satisfaction for the company to bring the body back right under their noses," the lieutenant mused. "Go ahead."

They all climbed into the trench on the slippery ladder. Three of the blacks, Koulibali among them, prepared to go. The lieutenant drew Bernard aside.

"FUNNY to see this, Sergeant. I've read of that sort of thing happening in Africa, and didn't believe it after what I had seen of the negroes. White chief—first time I've heard that pronounced as in the story books." He hesitated. "I don't know whether I'd be upheld in letting them risk it, after the number that got bumped off today, so I'm going to the dressing station. If any one asks you, tell them I left before I knew anything."

He had hardly turned his back when the three negroes vanished over the edge of the trench. Bernard stood at a loophole. But he could not see five yards through the sleet and darkness. Any moment a rocket might go up and the crawling men be riddled by the enemy. He looked at his watch and resumed his station before the embrasure.

The detonations of the cannon crashed continuously; the horizon was lighted by livid bursts. But the sergeant was accustomed to the noise, and could perceive lighter sounds, as one may hear a single, familiar voice above the roar of a crowd. He quivered. A machine gun had opened fire straight in front. Another chimed in, some yards off to the left, then others until there were five or six in action. But no rocket went up.

The firing ceased, started again, swelled and subsided in gusts of two or three minutes' duration . . . Thirty minutes dragged by.

A cautious whistle, and Koulibali slid into the trench.

"Get him?" the sergeant asked.

"No," Koulibali replied. "The others are with him."

"What are they waiting for?"

"Not waiting—they're dead." Koulibali took the sergeant's hand, placed it on his back. "Machine gun tore my clothes—hit me a little. Not much. Others were near me. Said nothing, guess they're dead."

The waiting Tirailleurs stirred, whispered among themselves. Then three went out. Again followed long minutes of tension. The machine guns crackled in the darkness. After a long wait, three more left.

Bernard did not try to stop them. How futile would be words compared to the danger outside. The men in the trench near Bernard waited mutely. Others, intrigued by the gathering, drew near, among them M'Barick Phal.

Again came that firing in total darkness. This time a man returned, Fakko. He was unhurt, but trembling.

"I know what's wrong, Sergeant. We got to the captain quick enough. And there were the other men, all dead. We felt them over to find out. Then we came back to the captain. I lay on the ground to pull him by the shoulders, the other two got hold of his feet. Then the machine guns started and the bullets dropped on us. The other two were killed. I tried to drag the captain by myself, but the minute I gave a jerk, they shot again. Every time I pulled, they shot. Then I knew. The Germans have tied a wire on his foot and tied the other end to something that makes a noise in their trench."

"A bell," Bernard suggested.

"Yes, they knew we were blacks and would come for the captain."

The sergeant understood. Knowing the reverence some negroes still felt for their chiefs, dead or alive, the enemy had trained several machine guns, by daylight, to bear on the spot, to shoot across and around the body.

Bernard found himself growing angry at the grim, persistent courage of the blacks. Seven men had been killed to bring in a corpse.

"I go again," Koulibali said.

"Fool," Phal put in.

"Speak not," the Bambara replied coldly. "Thou are not a true Senegalese. Talk, talk, palaver, palaver—never can be white, and no longer black. We Africans fight for our chiefs."

"I do not fear," Phal retorted.

"No, thou dost not fear death. But the talk of small men who say 'white men are no good for blacks', and 'blacks are big fools to help them'—such talk thou dost fear. We Bambaras wear no white men's garments at home, but we have men's hearts in our chests. Aside, prattler!"

"Shut up, Phal," Bernard ordered. He said to Koulibali, "You'll only get yours, stupid. No one is to go."

But M'Barick Phal suddenly stepped forward.

"These savages are stupid, indeed," he said. "They'll touch the captain and be killed. Give me a pair of nippers, and I'll find and cut the wire." He tore the tool from Koulibali's hand. "Thou'lt see whether Senegal is not better than Soudan, fool!"

Before Bernard could prevent him, he was out of sight. Once, twice, the machine guns fired. Then all was still until Phal slid into the trench, to safety.

"I cut the wire, Sergeant."

"Then others will bring in the body."

"No—" Phal swayed on his feet, grinning— "I have brought it in."

He reached up, grasped something outside and pulled. A long, besmirched form fell into his arms.

"Look, Soudanese, there is thy chief."

Down in the dugout, Bernard was bandaging Phal's side, after a copious application of iodine. The black had been struck in the flank, a bullet grazing the ribs. And, suddenly, the sergeant was startled to see tears gleaming in the candle light on the negro's cheeks.

"Hurt that much?" he asked, unbelievingly. The stoicism of the black was well known.

"No, Sergeant, it's not that."

"Then what — if not the pain?"

"I was a fool—risking myself for a dead white man."

"It was from pride," Bernard consoled him. "You could not permit those inland blacks to laugh at a genuine Senegalese. I understand—pride dies hard in a man, even a red socialist." He laughed cheerfully. "You're not the first of the breed to drop back into traditional respect, old man."

"It's not Koulibali's words that made me go," Phal replied. "I have only scorn for their opinion—those men who go nude in the forest. But I have intelligence; I know that this isn't our quarrel. Yet, something in my belly stirred and made me want to go—because he was white, because he was dead and because he was our chief. I weep because we shall always be slaves—we blacks."

"Men, rather," Bernard corrected.

"What matters the word?" Phal looked up at his white chief with anguish in his eyes. "That remains the fact—you lead, we follow."

And M'Barick Phal, private, wept on as he felt dying within himself the old rebellion and the craving for leadership of men.

Elsewhere, on the tumultuous plateau, long files of plodding white men waited for the order that would hurl them onward again, with the same sad wonder in their hearts.

Some lead—and some follow.

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

The LION TRACKER

A DARKLY tanned man with a leopard cub on the shoulder of his khaki jacket came into my office. Kalahari McDonald they call him on the fringe of the great desert where he earns his living. He is a famous man in his own remote corner of South Africa, one of a little band of restless spirits who are keeping alive the traditions of Selous and those other fearless hunters who have passed out on the last, long *safari*.

McDonald has lived all his life among the dunes and tall grass of the Kalahari Desert—an unknown territory which has been crossed by roving Boers in their trek wagons, and again recently by motor trucks, but which no man has ever thoroughly explored. McDonald's farm at Nosob has become a little zoo, for he lives in the midst of wild game and his life is all adventure.

His trackers are tiny Bushmen—those dregs of humanity who can find water in the desert purely by instinct, who still use poisoned implements in the chase.

Traveling by motor truck along the dry beds of old rivers, McDonald and his Bushmen set out regularly in search of lions, leopards, silver jackals and bucks. A good lion skin is worth seven pounds in South Africa, and *karosses* of jackal skins fetch as much as twenty pounds. But Kalahari McDonald earns his livelihood dangerously. More than once he has faced a wounded lion with only one cartridge left in his Lee-Metford, and gambled with his life for those seven sovereigns.

When a lioness or female leopard is killed there may be cubs and a greater reward for the hunter. In Cape Town a leopard cub is worth twenty-five pounds, and zoos in Europe and America pay much more. Kalahari McDonald's children play with these growing lion and leopard cubs and find them as friendly as dogs. One rule is strictly observed—the cubs must be fed at the same hour daily.

A seven weeks old leopard cub, which had been playing with the McDonald children, missed its morning meat and milk. It walked straight out of the house and killed a lamb.

B. M. BOWER

Gives us the first of a series of stories about the Son of a Texas Killer

The KID *from the* BRAZOS

THE KID was running away, but he was taking his time about it and he was enjoying every foot of his flight. Sometimes when a curlew circled and gazed down curiously with his yellow eyes peering, first one and then the other, the kid would stop dead still in the trail and, with his own eyes turned upward to the bird, he would call "kor-*reck!* kor-*reck!*" in playful mimicry. Other times he would pull from his breast pocket a mouth harp worn through to the brass in places where his fingers clasped it, and would polish it gravely on his sleeve, set the tiny pigeonholed edge to his smooth young lips and ripple a few notes to match the meadowlark's song. From that he would slide into "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and "The Spanish Cavalier". But at this particular moment the mouth harp reposed in his pocket with his Bull Durham bag, and he was singing:

"A Spanish cavalier stood in his retreat
And on his guitar played a tune, dear.
The music so sweet he'd ofttimes repeat,
The blessing of my coun-try and you-oo, dear!"

But for all his leisurely and tuneful progress, the kid was running away, and he had been running for nearly two months now. He was running from several things that had begun to harry him even at twenty. His father's enemies—such as had outlived his straight shooting old dad; but not the enemies so much as

the impending necessity of shooting such as were left alive. The kid had no ambition for carrying on the feud and getting the name of being a killer like his dad. He did not want to kill; he had seen too much of that and it carried neither novelty nor the glamor of adventure. Then, too, he was running away from a girl who had called him Tiger Eye to his face.

He had stood it from others, but not from her; at least, not when she said it in just that tone of voice. The kid always felt a streak of fire shoot up his spine when he thought of the way she had pronounced the name men called him. Always before he had accepted it just as he would have accepted any other nickname suggested by something in his character or appearance, but she had made it a taunt.

He couldn't change the tawny stare of his right eye, any more than he could remember not to squint his blue left eye nearly shut when he really meant something. His mother always told him he got that tiger eye at a circus she had visited before he was born. The kid didn't know about that, but he knew he had it and that it was the eye that looked down a gun barrel when he practised shooting, the eye that met danger unwinkingly, the eye that stared back when somebody tried to give him some of their lip. They didn't, very often; they seemed to expect him to ride with his right glove off and his gun loose in its holster, as his dad had done.

The kid left off gloves altogether except when he was working with a rope, but that was so he could play his mouth harp. His gun never had stuck in its holster and never would—his dad's training had been too severe for such bungling—but the kid never wanted to shoot any one. That was one reason why he had left home. He had expressed it all in one sentence to his mother when he told her goodby—

"I'll be killin' somebody, if I stay around heah."

And his mother had nodded in somber agreement and let him go. His mother didn't know about the girl.

That was over six weeks ago. The kid had pointed his pony's nose to the north and never once had he spread his blankets twice in the same camp. He had followed the trail of the wild goose winging high overhead to its nesting grounds. Rivers, deserts, mountains, plains—he had crossed them all. He'd be in Canada if he didn't stop pretty soon, he thought. He didn't want anything of Canada; too cold up there. He'd stay down in Montana where the chinook winds ate the snow right out from under your horse's feet in winter, according to what he had heard. Lots of the boys went up into Montana with the big trail herds and didn't come back; seemed to like the country fine.

It was nice country, all right, and the kid decided that he had about reached the end of his journey. From where the trail approached the edge of a high, wide plateau which the kid called a mesa, after the fashion of the southern ranges, he had a splendid view of the country spread out below him.

He did not see any houses, except within the wide arms of a coulee toward which the road seemed to lead. The kid could look right down into the wide mouth of that coulee and see the corrals, the squatty stable and the small house backed up against the red sandstone wall. It looked kind of snug and friendly down there. Maybe he could get a job and stop right there without looking any farther.

THE KID swung his slim body around in the saddle to see if his pack horse were coming right along as he should, and as he did so his buckskin horse squatted and shied violently away from something white fluttering in the top of a soapweed alongside the road. The kid stopped singing, pulled the horse up with a lift of the reins and wheeled him about to make him ride at the thing. Nothing but a piece of white paper—nothing to stampede a horse as trail-wise as old Pecos. Make him go right up and stick

his nose against it and smell it; teach him not to be afraid of a little paper.

The kid spurred Pecos toward the white flutter, talking to him softly. Twice the horse whirled away. The third time, the kid leaned and plucked the paper off the bush and examined the thing as he rode. It seemed to be a crude yet fairly accurate map of the country lying down below him, between the bench and the river. All the creeks were marked, and at certain points there were little penciled squares plainly indicating the ranches. Beside each square was a man's name and a brand. And before nearly every name there was an X, made black and distinct with pencil.

The kid spread the paper flat on his saddle horn and got it lined up with the country. Yes, here was the place he was coming to. According to this paper the ranch was owned by a man named Nate Wheeler and his brand was the Cross O. The kid grinned a little as he folded the paper and put it in his pocket. He was in luck. He could ride right up and call the man by name just as if he'd heard all about him. It would make a difference, all right. Nate Wheeler wouldn't think he was just some fly-by-night stranger riding through. He'd probably give him work; he would, if he had any.

"Oh-h, it's off to the war, to the war I must go,
To fight fo' my coun-try and you-oo,
deah . . ."

The kid had a nice voice, soft with that liquid softness which the South gives to its sons. He did not sing very loudly, having no desire to advertise himself to the country, for he was bashful and would blush if you spoke to him suddenly—that is, in a friendly tone. The other kind brought no flush; only that steady disconcerting stare of his yellow eye.

A man was riding toward him, coming out of the wide armed coulee to the left—the one which the map had identified as Nate Wheeler's place. He could not have heard the kid singing and he did not see the kid at once. The man was riding at a jog trot, his body jerking sidewise at each step the horse took. The kid saw him the minute he came around the bold rock ledge that marked that end of the coulee and he wondered if this might not be Nate Wheeler himself. He'd ask him, anyway, as soon as they met. He'd rather do that than ride up to the house and bone the fellow for a job in front of his wife; there was one, he knew by the skirts and aprons balooning on the clothesline alongside the cabin. A baby, too, if the little pink dresses didn't lie.

Pecos picked his way daintily down into a narrow wrinkle of the hill that swallowed the kid from sight for a good two hundred yards, the gravelly road slanting steeply down to the valley. Barney, the pack horse, was a little tender footed behind and came lagging along, favoring his feet where he could, and the kid, glancing back, let him take his time. Barney would catch up anyway when the kid stopped to talk with this man Wheeler, or whoever he was.

So it was that the two solitary horsemen rode up into sight of each other quite suddenly, fifty yards apart and the slope dropping away on either side. The rancher jerked his horse up as if about to wheel and ride back whence he came. The kid kept straight on. Then the rancher did a most amazing thing. He yanked his gun from its holster, drove the spurs against his horse and came lunging straight at the kid.

"Draw, you coyote! I'm comin' a-shootin'!" he yelled as he rode.

The kid was caught completely off his guard, but he had been trained in a hard school that accepted no excuse for fumbling. The *pow-w* of his .45 was no more than a split second slower than the other. He felt a vicious jerk at his hat just as his finger tightened around the trigger of his gun. Then he was riding forward to where the man had toppled from his horse. The little pinto shied away and would have started running, but the kid caught it with one sweep of his long arm that gathered in the trailing reins.

HE WAS sitting there on his horse staring incredulously down at the dead man when another horseman came galloping down a grassy ridge no more than a stone's throw away. The kid turned and looked at him hardly along the barrel of his gun.

"Stop where you're at!" he commanded in his soft drawling voice; and the stranger stopped, throwing up both hands, laughing as he did so.

The kid surveyed him critically with his peculiar, tigerish eye, the other squinted half shut. It gave him a deadly look in spite of his boyish youth; but he did not know that.

"That's all right—I'm a friend. Think I'd 'a' rode out in sight if I wasn't?" the stranger remarked easily. "I'm ridin' for the Poole."

Without moving his gaze the kid tilted his head slightly toward the twisted figure on the ground.

"Yo'-all heard what he said?"

"Yeah, I heard 'im. He had it comin', kid."

"I aimed to shoot his gun arm down. I didn't aim to kill him."

"You'd been outa luck, kid, if you hadn't. He'd 'a' got you."

"Plumb crazy," said the kid. "Comin' at me thataway."

"Shore was. You from the South?"

"Brazos," the kid answered succinctly.

"Yeah. Well, it's lucky I happened along. My name's Garner—Babe Garner. How come you're ridin' to Wheeler's?"

The kid gave one further look at Garner, decided that he was all right and holstered his gun. He pulled the folded paper from his breast pocket, opened it and tilted it so that the other, riding closer, could see.

"This place over heah was the closest," he explained, pointing a finger at the name and the X. "This Wheeler?"

"Yeah." Babe Garner looked from the paper up into the kid's face. His own steely eyes were questioning, impressed. "You shore as hell don't waste any time. Mind tellin' me your name?"

"Bob Reeves." The kid looked full at Garner, a defiant expression around his mouth. "Folks call me Tiger Eye back home. They gotta be friends to do it, though."

Babe Garner glanced obliquely at the heap on the ground, nodded and looked away, up the road and down.

"Say, you better fog along to my camp with me," he said uneasily. "These damn' nesters is shore mean. Let the pinto go. Anybody come along and catch you here, it's fare ye well. What kinda gun you got?"

"Colt .45."

"Good. That won't tell nothin' if the nesters get snoopy. Come on, Tiger Eye. I'll see you through with this."

He wheeled his horse and led the way back up the hill, and the kid followed without a word. Talking was never his habit and he certainly was not in the mood now for conversation.

The damn', dirty luck of it! Havin' to shoot the first man he saw in the country, the one he was going to strike for a job! Of course, having Babe Garner show up as a friend was shuah lucky, but it couldn't offset that other thing. Another thing bothered him; how had he happened to miss, like that? He had aimed at Wheeler's gun arm. How had he shot so far wide that the bullet went through Wheeler's head? Killer Reeves' son shootin' wide of the mark!

"Pap shuah would peel me fo' that if he knowed about it," the kid thought glumly, again and again.

It never occurred to him that his father or any one else would disapprove of the shooting. That was a case of have-to. And as he meditated gravely on the necessity of defending himself he remembered the jerk of his big hat and took it off to see just what had happened.

There it was—a hole right in the middle of the crown. The kid passed one hand over his head and brought it away with a lock of hair the size of his forefinger; a curl, to be exact. Locks of hair were quite likely to stand out from the kid's scalp in half moons and circles. He was regarding the reddish yellow curl soberly,

his lips pursed a little, when Babe Garner glanced his way.

"Damn' close," Babe commented. "You want to keep your eye peeled hereafter. These nesters'll shoot a man on sight."

"What fo'?"

"'Cause they're damn' cow thieves and the Poole has called the turn," Babe said savagely. "They hang together like sand burrs to a dog's tail. Us Poole riders is fair game to them. You heard what he hollered?"

"Yeah, I heard."

"That's the nester's war whoop, these days. The Poole has lost four men in the last month. We're needin' riders that can shoot. You come in time."

THE KID rode for awhile in silence, his bullet torn hat pulled low over his eyes, his fingers absently toying with the reddish curl. Abruptly he turned his tiger stare on Babe.

"How many men has the nesters lost?"

Babe hesitated, gave his head a shake, laughed one hard chuckle.

"You know of one, anyway," he said meaningly.

The kid questioned no further, but followed silently in Babe's lead. Over a lava bed they went, where the horses must pick their way carefully but where they left no track. Down along the rim of the benchland, past the head of the coulee marked on the map as Wheeler's. Once, the kid looked down almost upon the roof of the cabin. A woman came out and began pulling the clothes off the line, her back to the bluff. A baby in a pink dress toddled out on the doorstep, sat down violently and began to squirm backward off the step. Wheeler's baby. Only there wasn't any Wheeler, any more. Just a heap back there in the trail.

They swung back from the rim, and the kid saw no more of the cabin and the woman taking clothes off the line, and the baby crawling down backward off the step. Cute little devil. Run to meet his pappy, most likely, and want a ride on the pinto horse.

What devil's luck was it that had made the kid shoot wide, like that? Used to shoot the pips out of cards somebody held out for him—Sis would hold cards out for him to shoot, any time. Never had missed like that before. The kid could not understand it. It worried him almost as much as the killing.

Babe Garner had a snug cabin, not to be approached save from one direction, up a bare, steep little ridge to a walled in basin where two springs bubbled out from the rock wall and oozed away through ferns and tall grasses with little blue flowers tilting on the tops. Babe made him welcome, stabled the horses and cooked a good meal. He talked of many things, but not again of Nate Wheeler.

The kid did not talk at all, except to reply to direct questions, and never then with two words if one would carry his meaning. He washed the dishes while Babe wiped them, and swept the cabin, corners and all, and up-ended the broom behind the door as his mother had taught him to do. According to Killer Reeves' wife, boys must learn to cook and keep a house clean in a country where women are few, and the kid was well trained in more things than shooting. When all was done, Babe took a paper bound novel down off a high shelf where many more were piled. He glanced at the kid inquiringly.

"Lots to read if you want it," he offered, lying down on the bed with his folded coat under the pillow for greater height, and his loaded gun close to his right hand. "Make yourself to home, Bob."

"Reckon I'll take a ride," the kid said quietly, brushing off the stove top with a wild duck's wing. "Kinda get the lay of the land."

"Oh, sure." Babe studied the kid from beneath his lashes. "Want any help? We're pardners from now on—Tiger Eye."

"Thanks," said the kid, flushing with shy gratitude. "Yo'-all lay still and read yo' book, Babe. I'll be back."

"Take care of yourself," Babe gave

warning and farewell together, still covertly eyeing the kid.

"Shuah try," promised the kid, and let himself out into the warm, slanting sunlight. Babe got off his bunk and went to the door.

"Give this signal when you come up the trail, Tiger Eye," he directed, and whistled a strain like the cry of some night bird. "Us Poole boys hail each other that way at night. Safer. You hear that call, you can know it's a friend."

"Thanks," said the kid, and repeated the signal accurately. "Shuah will remember it, Babe."

"Shore you don't want no help?"

"I'll make out, I reckon."

"Well, take care of yourself, Tiger Eye."

"Shuah try, Babe."

Babe waited in the doorway until the kid came riding by the cabin, his long legs swinging gently with the easy, pacing stride of Pecos. Babe waved his hand and the kid waved back, his mouth smiling in wistful friendliness, his glance not tigerish at all though there was in it something vaguely disturbing. Babe went back to his bed and his book, but though he stared at the open page he did not read a line for five minutes. He was wondering about the kid.

The kid was wondering, too, but not about Babe. He was wondering who would do Nate Wheeler's chores, and he was wondering who would take in the body and who would bury Wheeler.

THE KID did not ride back the way Babe had brought him. He circled around another way, and so came into the trail from the north instead of the south. He hoped the body of Wheeler had been discovered before now, but it had not. The reddish light of the sun just setting behind a distant mountain range touched the huddled figure with a sanguine glow. The pinto pony, more faithful than most horses, stood there worriedly beside the trail just where the kid had dropped the reins at Babe Garner's suggestion.

The trail was empty as far as the kid could see in either direction, and the wide valley lay steeped in mellow light, tranquilly aloof from Nate Wheeler's little tragedy.

Shuah was an empty country, thought the kid. Nobody stirrin' around much—a body could lay out all night and coyotes find it before anybody happened along. And again he thought of the woman pulling skirts and aprons and little pink dresses off the whipping clothesline, while the baby cannily turned around and crawled backward off the doorstep.

He rode at a sharp lope down the lower slope of the trail and around the point of rocks, across the wide mouth of the coulee and up to a gate not far from the house. Nate Wheeler had closed that gate behind him carefully, as a thrifty rancher should, giving thought to drifting stock. The kid also took time to close the gate before he rode up and dismounted to knock at the cabin door.

A woman's face at the window peered out at him. The kid felt that hot streak of shyness shoot up his spine as her steps came toward the door. But the chill of the message he carried steadied him as the door pulled open three inches—no more—and her thin, worried face showed there in the crack.

"Evenin', ma'am. Theah's a man—layin' back up heah a piece in the road. I—er—your husband—home?" The kid got the words out between gulps at his growing Adam's apple and his face was red.

"No, Nate's gone." She opened the door another three inches and looked at him unafraid. He was so young and so shy, and his voice had the crooning melody of the South. "He ought to be back any time now. Is it—is the man—"

"Dead, I reckon." A bold statement, but the kid's voice robbed it of harshness.

"Oh!" The woman shrank back a little, but not from the kid. "Is he—do you know who it is?"

"No'm, never saw him befoah. A—he was ridin' a pinto hoss." That would tell her, thought the kid and, looked away.

"Nate! They've got Nate! They said they would—they nailed a warning on the gate—they've killed him!"

Then she pulled herself together and came out on the step, closing the door behind her to shut the baby in. The kid could hear the baby's inarticulate urging to be let out. His little fists began beating an indignant tattoo upon the door.

"Where is he? Is it far? I'll go with you. The murdering devils! How far is it?"

"No'm, yo'-all better stay right heah. I'll go pack him in, Mis' Wheeler. I'll pack him on his hoss."

Inside, the baby was still beating its fists upon the door when the kid thrust toe in the stirrup and reined Pecos back up the trail. The mother stood upon the step and watched him go, her hand up and shielding her eyes from the last direct sun rays. Her face was white and her mouth was grim. The kid did not look back, but he knew she was standing there watching him go, and he knew there was murder in her heart; not for him who brought the message—for the man who had shot her husband.

A bleak sense of being somehow tricked by circumstance swept over the kid. It wasn't fair. He wasn't a killer, he hadn't wanted to kill. He, who had shot the pips out of cards his own sister held out for him, how had he ever shot so wide that the bullet meant for a man's gun arm had gone through his head? A good six inches off to one side. Not even the amazing suddenness of Nate Wheeler's attack could excuse such shooting as that.

Draw and shoot—and snip the heart out of the ace of hearts six times out of six; or the diamond; or call the pips and pick them one by one out of a six-spot tacked to a post, and drive in the head of the tack after he had reloaded. Draw and shoot—that was the way Killer Reeves had taught his son. No, sir, not even the surprise of Nate Wheeler coming at him full belt could ever excuse such shooting as that shot which had killed Nate Wheeler.

Shuah funny, Babe Garner being right there close where he could see and hear the whole thing. Never needed any explainin'—just took it for granted the kid only did what he had to do. Never said a word, either, about that poor shooting. Six inches wide of the mark. Pap shuah would turn in his grave if he was to know Tiger Eye couldn't shoot any straighter than that. Shuah white of Babe Garner, though, taking him right home with him before the nesters got wise to what he had done.

That little woman standing on the doorstep shading her eyes with her hand. The baby inside, pounding the door with his fists, wanting to come out. The kid gave his head an impatient shake, trying to shake that picture out of his mind. Shuah hell, the way things happened sometimes.

Gettin' Wheeler on the pinto, tyin' him on with his own rope—like packin' a deer out of the hills along the Brazos. Like packin' Buck Thomas in from that fight Pap and Buck had with the Gonzales boys. The pinto was a little snorty over the dead smell, but gentle. The kid worked calmly enough, but he worked fast and he did not look straight at Nate Wheeler's face; not once. Damn' shame. Couldn't miss on a deer or a coyote or anything like that—had to go and miss on a man. Babe Garner called it lucky, but the kid couldn't see it that way. Shooting Wheeler's arm down would have done just as well. Better. A damn' sight better for the woman and that baby.

She was down by the gate waiting in the dusk when the kid came riding up, leading the pinto with its grim pack. Up in the cabin the baby was hollerin' its head off, wanting to get out. Mad, that little devil. Shuah had some temper. Bet it wasn't sheddin' a tear; just yellin' at the shut door.

The little woman unfastened the gate, her fingers clinging to the weathered strap worn slick in her husband's hands. Hundreds of openings, hundreds of closings, in daylight and dark, in haste and at

leisure, in fair weather and blinding blizzards. And now the buckle must loosen to let the pinto walk through with Wheeler's dead body tied across the saddle like a shot deer—head hanging down on one side, feet in rider's boots with rundown heels dangling a bit stiffly on the other side. Rope crisscrossed over his back, holding him in place.

She did not speak as the dark burden went through. Just reached out and caught a swaying, inert hand and laid it swiftly against her cheek and let it go. The kid swallowed hard and turned his tiger stare straight ahead, up the trail toward the unlighted cabin. Baby in there hollerin' like hell. Didn't want to stay alone. Scared of the dark, maybe. Kickin' on the door—the kid could hear the *thump* of the little scuffed shoes as he rode up. Spunky little devil. Few years bigger, he'd go gunnin' for the man that killed his pappy. Nothing to do now but try and kick the door down, wantin' his mother.

Shuah plenty of spunk, though. Spunk like his pappy had, ridin' straight at a strange rider and yellin', "Draw, you coyote!" That took spunk. Didn't know he was meeting up with Tiger Eye, old Killer Reeves' son. Didn't know Tiger Eye had the name of never missin' a shot. Didn't know—didn't know that was the one time Tiger Eye was due to miss. Hell of a note, missin' that one shot.

"I'll go fix the bed for him," the little woman announced dully, coming up as the kid halted at the doorstep and swung limberly down from the saddle. "I put my washin' on the bed till I could get time to sprinkle down the clothes."

Sounded like the kid's mother, always planning her housework. Sprinkle down calico skirts and check aprons and little pink dresses. Roll them tight and cover them up till the irons got hot. Sprinkle the pink baby dresses with tears now, most likely. No need to push the irons back and cook supper for her man when he got home. Home, all right—but he wouldn't want any supper. Hell of a note, shootin' crooked like a damn' Mexican.

The kid was unfastening the rope where the last hitch had been taken in the middle of Nate Wheeler's back. The body had sagged to one side, and the kid lifted it by one arm—the gun arm, the one he had meant to shoot down. The arm gave limply in his grasp, the bone shattered above the elbow; and the kid froze to an amazed immobility for ten seconds, his mind blank, his fingers groping and testing.

Arm shuah was plugged, all right. Not a doubt in the world about that. Shuah funny he hadn't noticed it before. But then, Wheeler had fallen on that side and his arm had been underneath, and the hole in his head was too plain to miss seeing. It never had occurred to the kid to look at that arm. Hadn't happened to get hold of it when he loaded him on the pinto, either. Hell, he hadn't missed after all! Hit the arm right where he aimed, up above the elbow where there was only one bone to bust and no great harm done. Few weeks in a sling, arm good as ever. The kid knew. He'd had a bullet in the arm once, by mistake. Darn' fool brother trying to do stunts with cards, the kid fool enough to hold the card.

THE KID felt the little heat waves streaking up his spine at the woman's voice from the doorway, and the heat warmed and dissipated that cold lump he had been carrying in his chest. He hadn't bungled that shot, after all. Wheeler had ducked his head right in line with the bullet. It was an accident—and that made a difference; a very great difference to the kid, justly proud of his skill.

He lifted Wheeler's body from the pinto to his own back, shouldering it as he had shouldered many a slain buck. He carried it in and laid it on the bed now neatly spread with white marbled oilcloth from the table—careful housewife even in her grief, this little woman—and composed the dead legs in their worn

leather chaps, and the hands primly folded one upon the other across the blue "chambry" shirt with all the white buttons sewn neatly in place by his wife who now stood staring down at him with the hot, dry eyes of hate. Hate for the man who had killed her husband. The kid knew just as well as if she screamed aloud the curses seething within her mind and heart. Quiet kind, she was; the kind his mother always said would take things hard.

She stooped now and picked up the baby and set him astride one bony hip and wiped his nose and cheeks with a corner of her apron. Red headed little tike, that baby. Red headed like his pappy. Nate Wheeler had red hair, sandy mustache and yellow splotches of freckles on his cheek bones; his hands were freckled on their hairy backs, and his wrists, too. Baby had four teeth, two above and two below like a squirrel, only stubby and white. It pointed now to Wheeler and said, "Daddy—go bye?" Twice, it said it, waving its chubby arm toward the bed.

That did something to the woman, kinda. She grabbed the baby's arm down and turned away quick, and sat down on a rocking chair and started moaning and rocking, the baby's face pressed so close against her shoulder that its little stubby nose was flattened and it kicked like a calf at the branding fire, trying to get loose. Never cried, though. Shuah was a spunky little devil.

"Anything yo'-all want me to do—milkin' or anythin like that?" The kid stood by the door with his bullet torn hat in his hand, trying to keep the red out of his face.

"No—oh, no—oh, feed the pinto—and team." The little woman still rocked the baby, speaking jerkily like that between her moaning.

The kid went out and led Pecos and the pinto down to the stable. Pecos, because he never separated himself very far from his horse when he was in strange country. In the stable everything was neat and orderly. Even in the gloom of a dusk fast deepening to night the kid could see the stalls were clean. No use wasting hay, though, keeping the horses inside when there was no man to use them. He turned the team into the corral where he heard the gurgle of water running into a trough in one corner from some spring back among the rocks, piped down to water the animals.

Pecos he led behind the stable where the rock wall came down sheer, ten feet away. Dark, back in there. Pecos snorted a little but he'd stand, all right. No use havin' him out in sight—not in a country where the nesters hollered "Draw, you coyote!" and then started popping it right to you without waiting to see if you were going to draw. Holler and shoot. That was the way Nate Wheeler had done. More spunk than brains, the kid decided, with youth's readiness to judge.

The chores were soon done; the pinto unsaddled and turned in the corral, the saddle riding an empty manger because the kid did not know where Nate Wheeler kept it. There were no cows to milk, though there should be, with that baby on the ranch. The kid was finished in ten minutes, and yet he lingered at the stable, hating to go back into the room where that woman sat rocking and moaning and squeezing her baby so tight it kicked.

How about a grave? There ought to be one dug—but maybe she had some particular place picked out in her mind where she'd want it. Women did; his mother, for instance. She always took the say when it came to digging a grave for some of the family. The kid found a pick and shovel in a little shed by the grindstone, but he only looked at them and stood them back again, shaking his head. She ought to have the say about that, but he hated to ask her.

RIDERS coming. Poole men, maybe, after Nate Wheeler. They oughtn't to bother the woman now, the way she was feelin'. The kid started running, slipping through the shadows with no noise at

all; running like an Indian and not with heavy, clumping steps that could be heard a mile. He reached the cabin door and opened it while the riders were still at the gate. In the dark he could not see the woman, but he heard the creak of the rocking chair pause and he heard the baby's sleepy little whimper, protesting because she had stopped rocking.

"Men a-comin' heah, ma'am. If yo'-all don't want 'em—"

"Oh, let 'em come," she answered wearily. "They can't do any more damage. They've got Nate—they ought to be satisfied with that."

She got up and crossed the room, and presently the kid saw her in the flare of a match she was drawing across the lamp wick. She blew out the match and slipped the glass chimney within the little brass guards, working with one hand, the baby drooping over the other shoulder, staring sleepily at the light. Clean chimney, the kid noticed. Clean with little flecks of lint on the glass until they disappeared in the heat. Good housekeeper—Nate Wheeler'd had a good wife, anyway.

The riders stopped outside the cabin and some one whistled a call—but it was not the night bird call Babe Garner had taught the kid. Different. This was the first strain of that old war song, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home". The kid's lips puckered thoughtfully and he repeated the strain, standing just inside the closed door. Friends, they must be; that is, friends of the Wheelers. He wouldn't have to dig that grave, after all. The kid was glad, for he hated grave digging. It was a job they always put off on to him at home and he had got so he hated the sight of a pick and shovel. Still, of course, when it was a case of have to—

He opened the door and the men came in; four of them, one after the other. Shaggy, farmer looking men, with stubbly cheeks that stuck out on one side with great cuds of tobacco. The kid felt a vague distaste for them. They better look out where they spit, he warned them mentally. She'd just scrubbed the floor that day and they better be careful.

They halted at sight of him, huddling just within the room instead of scattering as they ought to have done if they meant to start something. But the kid's hat was off and though it dangled from his left hand he looked at home there, somehow. Besides, they had got their signal all right. The leader, a tall man with eyes too close together and separated only by a high, thin beak of a nose, glanced around the room and relaxed when he saw the little woman in the chair, rocking her baby to sleep and patting its little pink dress with soothing, stroking motions of her right hand. He did not see what was on the bed, for that was behind the door in the shadow, and the kid stood in the way. The tall man relaxed, dropped his hand to his side.

"We come to tell Nate there's a meetin' over to Hans Becker's place and we'd like to have him go along." He cast another suspicious glance toward the kid and checked what more he would have said. "You better git ready and go too. The women are talkin' about stayin' all together over there where it's a big house and plenty of room, till we git the Poole." He stopped again. "This boy workin' for you?" he asked bruskly.

"He's—been helping me."

"Oh. I don't call him to mind. Want to look out for strangers. Where's Nate?"

The little woman lifted her hand from patting the baby, and pointed one finger sternly to the corner where stood the bed.

"Sick?" The tall man lowered his voice, scowling a little. The kid sensed that a sick nester would be considered a nuisance.

A head shake was his answer, and the kid did not move. The man's scowl deepened.

"No time to go on a toot, with the Poole—"

"They got him." Nate's wife spoke in that dull, level tone which the kid hated to hear. "Shot him on the road somewhere. The boy found him and brought him home."

The kid stood aside for them as they rushed to the bed to look at Nate, but no one paid any attention to him. Not then. The tall man brought the lamp and they examined the body rather thoroughly, stooping with their heads almost touching, lifting the arms and turning the body this way and that. They muttered together, but the kid could not hear what they said, because he stayed back, near the foot of the bed. Near the door, too. No use letting them block the way out, even if they did think he was working for the Wheelers. He would have been, maybe, if things had gone different.

One man went to the wash bench and filled the basin with water.

"There's clean rags on the lower shelf of the cupboard there behind the stove," said Nate's wife, without turning her head or looking any way except straight before her.

She knew what was going on, then. The kid let out a careful breath. She wasn't so upset she didn't know, and she wouldn't say anything to give him away. Well, come to think of it, she couldn't. She didn't know anything to tell.

ONE MAN held the basin, another the lamp, a third man washed where the tall man told him to. The kid's eyes went again and again to the tall man's face, bent down in the full light of the lamp. Mean looking, that nester. Plumb ornery and mean and tricky. The kid thought that even if the tall man was a friend you wouldn't want to turn your back on him. Just looking at him made you feel like lifting your hair and showing your teeth like a dog.

There was a sudden and significant pause in the washing. The tall man leaned lower and probed carefully with a finger, then stood up and spat over his shoulder into the shadows. The kid's tiger stare became more fixed and malevolent at that, but he craned his neck to hear what the man was going to say about that hole in Nate Wheeler's head. The tall man did not mention the wound, however. Instead of that he looked past his companions, fixing his unpleasant gaze on the kid.

"You over there, what's your name?"

"Bob Reeves," said the kid, looking down at his hat, which was about on a level with every gun butt in the room.

"Reeves—don't know that name. Where you from?"

"Brazos."

The kid did not lift his eyes, much. But he got a pretty comprehensive view through his lashes. He saw the three move a little away from the tall man, as if they expected something.

"He brought Nate home to me. And he did the chores." The little woman in the rocking chair, holding her baby in her arms, stopped rocking and turned her anguished eyes upon the tall man. "He's been awful nice and accommodating, Pete Gorham."

"Accommodatin'!" The tall man snarled the word like an oath. "Prob'ly one of the Poole's new Texas killers they shipped in! You heard him—he's from the Brazos. That's in Texas. Accommodatin'! Accommodated you mebbe by killin' Nate. Willin' to take Nate's place, mebbe!" The sneer in that sentence was so obvious that the man with the basin spilled half the water while he growled a remonstrance.

The kid lifted his eyes now, though one was squinted shut and the other was the eye of a tiger. They did not see him draw his gun, but the little woman jumped and caught her baby up against her breast at the shattering roar of the kid's shot.

"That's to earmark yo'-all so white folks'll know and walk wide of a skunk," drawled the kid as the tall man clapped a hand to his head. "And that's for spittin' on the floor," he added on the echo of another shot. " 'Scuse me, ma'am. I couldn't stand to see him insult yo'-all thataway."

No one in that room saw the kid make a hurried move, but the door opened, fanned the acrid haze of powder smoke and shut with a bang. Where the kid

had stood there was empty space. They looked at one another, and they looked at Pete Gorham with the blood trickling down each side of his neck from bullet holes bored through the tops of his ears that stood out against the black brim of his hat!

Once more the kid was running away, but he was not taking any more time about it than was necessary. He ran lightly, silently, a swift moving shadow in the gloom. He went so quietly that he did not startle the four horses standing grouped before the cabin and he did not frighten Pecos when he suddenly appeared in that dark niche behind the stable. He was in the saddle and waiting, peering forth like a fox from its burrow, when he heard the cabin door open, saw a dim shape steal out. Then another, and after a minute one more.

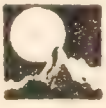
Afraid of him, the way they acted. Afraid he would hide outside in the dark and pick them off one at a time as they came out. That was about their notion of what a Texas killer would be like. That was about the way they would fight—Pete Gorham, anyway.

The kid remembered that name and he remembered the place on the map where Pete Gorham had his ranch. Over across the valley, it was, kind of off by itself. His brand was the IV. Now he would go earmarked the rest of his life. He'd hate the kid for that. Go gunnin' for him, maybe, but that was all right. Save him the trouble of trying to make out he was a friend. Shuah was a neat trick, and tempting, too, with his ears sticking up like a field mouse under his black hat. Shuah made a fine mark, easier than shooting the pips out of cards.

The kid gave a sudden boyish laugh at the thought of those ears with their round bullet holes. The three went in again, slipping in one at a time. The kid grinned again. He'd bet Pete Gorham was the man that stayed inside and didn't come out.

After awhile they came out again, this time with a lantern, one man walking away ahead as if he were on guard. The kid didn't know about that lantern. If they went snooping around, and if they looked behind the stable, he might have to shoot somebody. Better not take a chance. So he backed Pecos a step at a time, back and back until they were out beyond the stable. There he could ride around behind the corral and off down toward the gate, away from the trail where a deep little dry gully would hide it from view. The kid called it an arroyo, after the manner of the South.

There, within sight of the gate—within easy shooting distance, too—the kid waited, off his horse so his head wouldn't stick up like a signpost above the bank and tell them where he was. They thought he had ridden from the ranch, for they went back and forth with the lantern, the legs of the three men walking in the fitful light. The kid watched, and saw them hooking the team to the wagon. They were going to take the woman and the baby over to Hans Becker's, then. The kid was glad of that.



HALF an hour more, while the kid waited with the patience of an Indian in the gully not far from the gate. They drove away from the house at last, coming this way. One man driving the team, his horse following behind the wagon. The little woman on the seat beside him. Two riders going ahead. That left one man in the cabin with Nate Wheeler—but the kid would bet the man that stayed wasn't Pete Gorham with the bullet holes through his ears.

Half a mile behind them, he followed the little cavalcade. Easy enough, with the cluck of the wagon coming faintly through the starlight. The kid wondered if they were afraid he might be on their track. Maybe not. His little argument with Pete was kind of personal. One man didn't like Pete's remarks any too well. He'd be glad Pete got himself earmarked thataway.

Nice and accommodating, the little woman had said. The kid's lips twisted in a smile too bitter for his young face.

Shuah, he was accommodatin'! [He was accommodatin' enough to pack her husband home and not let him lay out all night with her wondering where he was—after he'd killed him! Nothin' very damn' accommodatin' about that, but still, the kid was glad she thought that way of him. He wouldn't want her to know the truth.

And then he came back in the weary circle to the same cruel fact. Tonight was not like any other night in his life. He had killed a man. Accident or not, a man was dead by his gun hand. Every night of his life, from now on, he would have to go to sleep thinking of that. Tiger Eye—in Texas they had joshed him and told him his tiger eye was a killer eye, and he had cussed them back and said it wasn't so. They knew it wasn't, too. But since he had to kill, why couldn't he have killed one of those old varmints that hated the Reeves blood? Why did he have to ride away up here, hundreds of miles, just to fix it so that red headed little cuss would grow up without its pappy?

The kid wondered a good deal about that, on that slow ride to Hans Becker's place. He looked up at the stars and wondered what they thought about the world, anyway. Did they think up there that this was just a speck of light? And if folks lived on the stars like the school books claimed, did they kill folks and wish they had let themselves get shot first? But a man had to defend his own life. Pappy had always hammered that into the kid. Everybody did. The law stood back of yo'-all in that. But somehow, tonight, the law and his pappy's stern teaching could not comfort the kid. He followed the wagon to Becker's ranch and saw the men gathered there, and knowing the signal he softly whistled the first two bars of "When Johnny Comes Marching Home", and so got by the man on guard at the gate.

The room would not hold all the men gathered there, and some stood outside in the dark and talked and smoked. Drank, too, from bottles that went from hand to hand until they were emptied and thrown away.

The kid did not talk, for he knew his Texas drawl would bring him no good. Men up here, they yapped like coyotes and he couldn't talk like them nohow. So he kept his mouth shut—which was easy for the kid—and his ears open. And when the gathering showed signs of breaking up he melted into the shadows so quietly he never was missed, and presently he rode past the unsuspecting guard at the gate and went his way.

The kid remembered the plain story of the map and cut straight across an arm of the valley on a trail he had not traveled before, until he was sure he had not been followed. Then he swung to the left and climbed over one ridge and followed up a cañon and left that for another bare ridge. After awhile Pecos caught on to the fact he was getting close to Barney, and began to tilt his ears forward and pull at the bit, wanting to lope up hill after all his travel that day. But the kid made him walk, the blame fool; wanting to bust his lungs on the last mile.

The kid eased himself in the saddle and pulled his mouth harp from his shirt pocket. He polished it gravely on his sleeve, set its little pigeonholed edge against his young lips and began to play softly while he rode along. He played "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" three times with intricate variations of his own invention. Then he played "The Spanish Cavalier"; and after he had played that twice he sang it softly, each note true as a silver bell but so faint a man within pistol shot would not hear one note of the song.

"Say, darling, say, when I am far away-ay,
Sometimes you may think of me, deah!
Bright sunny days will soon pass away,
Remember what I say, and be true, deah!"

THE KID was not thinking of any girl in particular while he sang that. He was singing because he felt like singing, and there was a yearning tenderness in the song that seemed to fit his mood.

Twenty yards from the cabin he heard the plaintive cry of a night bird that sounded scared. After a guilty pause he answered it faithfully and rode on.

"Damn you, Tiger Eye," Babe cursed him with exasperated relief, "don't you know I darn near took a shot at you?"

"Thought yo'-all would be in baid," the kid apologized in his melodious drawl.

"You thought wrong. I been on edge."

"Shuah mighty sorry fo' that, Babe."

The kid unsaddled Pecos, rubbed him dry and went whistling up the path. The cabin was warm and reeked with the smell of coal oil fumes and stale cigaret smoke. Babe's paper novel lay open, face down on the table, only two or three pages left unread at the back. Babe's gun was thrust inside his waistband just where his hand would drop easiest to the grip. Babe closed the door behind the kid, shutting out the lamplight from any one in the valley and looked the kid over.

"I damn' near saddled up and took after you, Tiger Eye," he said querulously. "These are shore bad times to be ridin' around alone. Nester see you—well, you oughta know."

"Shuah, I know." The kid's eyes were shining with a strange, soft light.

"Have any trouble? If it's a fair question."

"Not to call trouble. Trailed some nestahs to Sam Becker's ranch. Had a meetin' theah. Right smaht gatherin'. They aim to call the Poole men into a trap. Aim to make a big fuss in the Oxbow Bend. Roundup. Poole men'll go theah and half the nestahs will be cached in the pass—"

"Yeah?" Babe looked startled. "Say, that might 'a' drawed the Pool riders out, at that, if they didn't know it was a frameup. We been watchin' our chance to get 'em in the act. Damn' cow thieves. Most of 'em, anyway. Them that ain't stand in with the rest 'cause it's against the Poole. Nesters shore hates the big outfits, right er wrong.

"Say, you got no call to take a chance like that." Babe frowned. "Ef they'd 'a' caught you there, they'd 'a' strung you up in a holy minute. Don't you take another chance like that, Tiger Eye."

The kid did not say anything to that. He had discovered that Babe had made fresh coffee not so long ago, and he was cuddling the pot with his fingers and trying to judge whether the coffee would be fit to drink without reheating. He decided that it would, and reached for a cup hanging on a nail beside him.

"Say, you goin' to promise me you won't take no more chances like that?" Babe pressed the point.

"Shuah would hate to worry yo'-all, Babe," the kid said softly, pouring coffee and not lifting his glance to Babe.

"You got something more under your hat than what you told me," Babe charged, hesitating between anger and amusement. "Damn you, Tiger Eye, what more you been doin' tonight?"

The kid turned and looked long at Babe over his cup. His yellow eye was curiously softened.

"I been hearin' talk about Nate Wheeler," he said finally, and blinked when he saw how Babe failed to repress a start. "I been findin' out I didn't shoot so wide. I aimed to hit his gun arm down, and that arm shuah was just like I aimed it would be."

"Yeah?" Babe's eyes took on a hard, watchful look.

"I heard men say it was a rifle bullet hit him in the haid," the kid drawled softly. "I reckon yo'-all thought he was goin' to get me. I shuah am much obleeged to yo'-all, Babe."

Babe Garner stared, then laughed shortly and turned away.

"Yo're welcome, Tiger Eye." He turned and began thumping pillows with savage energy. "Which side the bed you want? Me, I like to lay on the edge where I can roll out quick."

"Just lay wheah yo'-all feels the best, Babe," grinned the kid, swallowing the last of the coffee. "I'm sleepin' sound tonight, no matter wheah I lay my haid."

The INVISIBLE GUNS

ANGUS—nicknamed Gup—McLeod, six feet two, Scotch, sensitive, but rendered a little cynical by the Great War which had devoured his company and revealed the faithlessness of his wife, soon chafed under his commission in India. He resigned, bored with governments, religions, philosophies and all the hollow panoply which rules the earth. A shred of Gup's Highland conscience remained, to defend him from savagery in his disillusionment. Rather than spite the English in India, he attempted to forget Britain and bury himself in the rôle of a horse trader in the border Hills.

But Gup McLeod was too handsome and individualistic for obscurity. Before he knew it he was carried into the deepest plot that ever transpired in the Indian Hills since the days of Alexander the Great.

Glint, a toothy, scheming major in the British service, suspected Gup of conspiracy against the British Empire; and, since rumors of unrest in Kabul, Afghanistan, beyond wild Khyber Pass, reached Glint, he anticipated invasion of India.

Between Afghanistan and India, the little native state of Jullunder was ruled by a woman, a clever ranee who had mar-

Continuing

A Novel of the Afghan Border and the perilous pass that leads to India

By

TALBOT MUNDY

of KABUL

ried the Rajah of Jullunder in better days when she was an actress in London and he was a visiting potentate. Since the rajah had died the ranee had been struggling to retain her power. She had to decide whether to cast her army of Hillmen with the Emir of Afghanistan—or whether, perhaps, to invade India on her own. Some of her decisions were doubtless based on reports by false advisers.

The ranee had been told of Gup McLeod's strange career in India, so she had him baited by her aide, Rahman—Rahman with the gray beard growing almost to his eyes and a sheepskin coat giving shapelessness to his loyal bosom—and since Gup was a horse trader the bait was a great black stallion. Gup nibbled at the promise of the magnificent horse; and Rahman saw that Gup was carried swiftly to Jullunder for negotiations. Having visited Jullunder, Gup could not return to British India without some compromise, especially as Rahman had seen to it that Major Glint believed Gup had whipped one of Glint's spying servants.

When Gup met Glint the encounter promptly became a fight. Gup whipped the Colt from Glint's hand, trampled on the Royal summons—and thenceforth Gup realized that he was a fugitive from injustice, snared by Rahman for the ranee. His curiosity about Jullunder led him to return with Rahman to the Hills, stubbornly resolving not to betray Britain, yet already unwilling to betray Jullunder.

"Lord, what a lousy universe!" Gup repeated as he followed Rahman northward.

"I told you so; Gup McLeod is up to no good!" snarled Major Glint, hurrying back to report to the high commissioner.

* * *

And neither sword nor heavy hafted spear,
Nor bow well strung with arrows straight and long
That wing their way obedient, is Fear,
Whose seeming strength is weakness and its weakness strong,
In turning on the user lunge and thrust—
Himself his adversary, effort its own foil,
Trust in an untrue tool undoing Trust,
Himself the warrior and war, his Faith the spoil.

CHAPTER VII

"THE JULLUNDER WOMAN? YOU BELIEVE IN THAT MARE'S NEST?"

PESHAWAR is a northern stronghold where the forces fret, protecting India against invasion. Take away those forces and as sudden or as gradual as their withdrawal would the inroad be of Hillmen weaned on the ancient law of survival of him who can take and get away with it. The forces fret like steam, or any other concentrated power kept ready for action and held in restraint. Their sentries are now and then murdered by fleece clad sportsmen, who creep through the midnight mist and slay for the sake of a rifle and a bandoleer; a rifle is worth its weight in silver money, and the British hospital takes care of any one who gets the wrong end of the luck, so the game is played without ill will but with determination that would shame the sluggard ant. Protected merchants in the sanitary, well policed bazar exorbitantly chouse their guardians. In proof that peace is not a blind goal of deluded theorists, the cemeteries quite surround the city. And, suggesting that there may be tides of destiny as well as of oceans and emotions, Moslem minarets look down on Buddhist ruins and the British troops parade within sight of where Mahmud conquered Ghazni. They protect the road along which Akbar's delegates passed to his province of Kabul. Some of the ashes of Buddha lie in the new museum. Some of the graves surrounding the wide city are those of much more recently dead students of the art of living loyally and dying game.

The wind sweeps from the mountains, blowing southward bugle music and the skirl of Scottish pipes. Dust of a parade ground drifts on statuary left by Alexander's Greeks. A few unveiled, unhonored Moslem ladies sing shrill hymns in the Zenana mission, while men from Samarkand and Kandahar, from all the ranges of the Hindu-Koosh, and from the Khyber and all the Himalayan sky high valleys eye the Hindu with a wolf lift of the upper lip and a curious, now and then ponderous, gleam of eyes that seem aware of fate and of the need to await the appointed hour.

In the midst of that, in what is known as luxury, resides a chief commissioner, a man of merely human zeal and only thirty or forty years' experience, whom possibly the gods of irony applaud for wishing he had something easy on his hands like Pontius Pilate's job. He has advisers, to increase his knowledge and to plough perplexity. Telegraph wires remind him he is no more than a corner knot in an enormous web of empire, trembling to the jerk and strain of politics at earth's ends. He is a gentleman by dint of having earned that title, a degree from the College of Life that makes most politics seem filthy, all forgiveness easy and severity difficult.

He will be damned for whatever he does, damned if he does nothing. And the condition of his liver—in Peshawar in the spring—is not always a fit subject for polite discussion. Furthermore, he knows a great deal that he must not tell to any one except his distracted seniors, who are seldom within twenty-four hours' reach.

"Yes, I know," said the chief commissioner.

The Moslem member of his council, whom he liked but dreaded because of his

gimlet-like ability to bore through screens of platitudes to the underlying, unformed judgment, sat beside him on the government house veranda where, over a breakfast table, in view of the everlasting hills, the conversation usually shaped the ultimate decisions of a council.

"This means God's own trouble," said the Moslem. "He has thrashed an officer in the presence of witnesses, and the news has leaked out."

"Glint took care it did," said the commissioner.

"And he has run away. Is he mad?"

"I hope so. That would be such an easy solution. Send him home and let him cool off."

"But if he is mad, and if he escapes death, he may join the emir! You have sent police after him? You had better send for a hundred thousand men to defend the border! I don't believe you realize the risk of an invasion by the emir."

The commissioner shrugged his shoulders, suggesting indifference in order to hide sensitive concern. He knew what the Moslem member did not—that almost all the available troops were needed to overawe India itself and prevent simultaneous rebellion in three provinces.

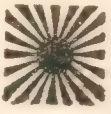
"The police are Pathans—Moslems. Surely you don't want him shot by a policeman? In my opinion—perhaps I am prejudiced—it would be a very bad thing, tending to destroy discipline, if an officer, even an ex-officer of your race, should be shot by a Pathan policeman. The news would be all over Peshawar in a moment. Human life is too cheap as it is. It would become cheaper. Perhaps I understand the Moslem psychology better than you do. It is a good thing that the person of the British officer is regarded as something almost sacred. Reduce or remove that restraint, and you will have every uncivilized and half civilized savage who thinks he owns a grudge taking the law into his own hands. Those of us who are civilized and educated recognize that. As long as British rule lasts here, it must be rule, not riot law. The persons of your countrymen must be inviolable."

"What do you suggest?" asked the commissioner.

"I would suggest this. He has probably ridden up one of the passes leading northward. In other words, he is beyond the border. I would send some one to pass the word quietly among the Hillmen that if he should be shot beyond the border there would be no questions asked and no reprisals."

"Can you imagine me doing that?"

"Disagreeable, of course, but duty wisely carried out is not often amusing to a man of honorable motive like yourself. You know very well that if he should be shot beyond the border it would be hushed up in any event. There might be questions asked, and threats made. But reprisals? You know there would not be any—not in the circumstances. And now let me try to make my opinion clear to you. If he should be shot beyond the border, without word having gone forth that he may be shot with impunity, that would be a bad thing. But if word should be secretly sent that he *may* be shot with impunity, the psychology would be altogether different and it might be a very good thing. McLeod looks like an important person even if he is not. It might be the spark in the powder barrel. It might cause the Hillmen to throw in their lot with the emir. And if he invades India, you know, they reason like children. They are marvelous fighting men, and to them murder is sport, but they are much more simple in their thought processes than they are sometimes given credit for. If the Emir of Afghanistan could count on the allegiance of the tribes he would invade India tomorrow."



A BULLET HEADED, gray haired man of fifty was announced, greeted with something approaching astonishment and offered breakfast, which he accepted. It took him an appreciable time to suppress irritation, but he was carefully, and even more than carefully

polite to the Moslem member of the council.

"Morning, Habib'ullah—glad to see you looking bright eyed. Not so worried about the emir as you were, eh? Legal affairs keep you busy? Snow you under, some day! Same as a bridge will fall on me and bust my reputation. But I always did thank God my job is public works. No money in it, but you need no brains."

"How did you get here, Trowbridge?" the commissioner asked.

"Plane. And, by the way, there should be something done about it. These damned idiotic orders against civilians getting a lift will lead to serious trouble. Some day there's going to be a crisis, and nothing done about it because some squirt of a pilot quotes his orders and tells a civilian to keep his trotters in the mud. Dammit! Know what I did? I told that young brass faced whipper-snapper about Admiral Nelson—telescope to his blind eye and all that blather. What'll you bet me they don't break him for having brought me here?"

The eggs came. With his spoon he smashed the top off one of them as if it were a flight commander's head.

"Dammit!" he said. "I'll have to save that youngster somehow. They'll break him as sure as tape's red. I wonder why they can't make decent coffee anywhere except in the United States? Yours not any worse than other people's. You mind oaring in? The youngster's name is Percy—Percy Simkins—wouldn't you know he'd have a name like that? But he's a nice boy. He deserves to be saved for a crash later on. Mind speaking for him?"

"I can probably drop the right word. But why your hurry?"

A second egg was decapitated with a sudden sideswipe of the spoon.

"That ass, McLeod, of course. The man's an idiot, but he's worth as many Glints as there are hairs on a hog's back. Glint tried to get us to S.P.A.* him at Dera Ismail Khan. Personal malice all over the proposal—Glint at his usual game of working off a grudge. I knifed it with a nod to Curtis, who could hardly sit at his desk, he was so rotten with malaria. Glint got a magistrate's summons against McLeod for assault on a spy who was eavesdropping under the fly of McLeod's tent. I don't believe Gup did it. What does he care who spies on him? Anyhow, some one flogged the spy and Glint swears he saw it happen. Glint, as usual, produces corroborative native testimony. Glint goes out to serve the summons—meets Gup—an exchange of compliments—Gup thrashes Glint—unfortunately doesn't give him half what any one of us would like to hand him—and there's your story—all of it."

The commissioner looked uncomfortable.

"No," he said, "unfortunately not all."

Trowbridge snapped his teeth into a piece of toast and munched savagely. He wiped his mustache. It bristled.

"The Jullunder woman? You believe in that mare's nest?"

"Have to. Can't avoid it. Information received."

"Shoot. Why not, and save time. I'm on the docket—so is Habib'ullah. She put it over on Gup McLeod? I'd sooner believe he'd joined the emir! He may have turned Bolshevist. He may believe the Soviets are the new dispensation and that the emir is the arm of Destiny. Some Scotchmen do that kind of thing. But Gup and an adventuress? Never!"

"You can look at the files in my office after breakfast. No, I have no information that she actually roped him. But she passed over the border with a string of mules and camels late last night, and information is that Gup McLeod's horses and tents were in the string. I don't know yet where he is—not exactly."

"Police after him?"

"Yes, but they haven't an earthly chance. The hell of it is that Glint was right. I know of nothing in the world more maddening than to have the predictions of a person of Glint's caliber come true. If any one but he had told

* Seditious Practises Act.

us the Jullunder woman was cooking mischief we would have paid more attention to it, and incidentally to her. But we were busy in other directions. She has slipped out of reach. It's one of those damned things that happen. And what is almost worse, we'll be saddled with Glint for years to come. No shaking him; he'll get the credit, and he'll make it hot for everybody. You know he has powerful friends in London? He may even force my resignation if the whole story comes out."

"You don't understand how to deal with Glint. Give him his head and he'll hang himself. Flatter him instead of getting in his way. Flattery poisons 'em; they go crazy and come a cropper. However, meanwhile what? You'd better send me up to survey a road from here to the Karakorum Mountains. I know Gup. He knows me. If I find him he will listen."

"Might do worse, Trowbridge, and might do better. But you're—"

"Fat headed and full gutted. Yes, I get you."

"You're a valuable man and badly needed here."

"Well, where is Tom O'Hara?"

"He should be here now. I sent for him at sunrise. He's a difficult devil to find when you want to lay your finger on him, but the air force knew where he was. They sent a plane."

"He's here then. I saw the plane coming. It was on the skyline when I landed."

"Right you are. Here's Tom O'Hara."

"Morning, sir. Thank you, had breakfast."

THE UGLIEST London Irishman who ever lived sat down at the commissioner's right hand, shoving his chair well back so that he could read three faces at the same time. He had red hair. A round, owlish face was liberally peppered with freckles of all shapes and sizes, in the midst of which a nose as predatory as an owl's beak curved into a scrubby red mustache. A pair of very lively, windy gray eyes seemed to look almost from the inside of his head through deep cavities spaced wide apart. He had come in haste, unshaven, so the reddish stubble argued with his red tie and with the madder color of the flannel suit he wore. He had a large ruby ring on one finger of a hand that was almost as hairy as his head. His feet, for his height, which was hardly five feet seven, were enormous, and he was of rather heavy, stocky build without an ounce of surplus fat. He could smile at will with eyes or mouth and at moments, when he used both, he looked hardly human because irregular wrinkles appeared and the freckles moved in waves. He offered no excuse for not wearing a uniform.

"O'Hara, the ex-Ranee of Jullunder crossed the border last night."

"I knew it, sir. I said it. Why wouldn't she? Eighteenth of April last year, half after four of the afternoon, I turned in details of her link-up with something like half of the chiefs this side of Kabul. I said it then—she'll cut loose. I wrote it. Look it up and see."

"I never saw that report," said the commissioner. "You turned it in at Delhi?"

"As per orders. Took a receipt, too."

"Well, it's too late to look into that now. Gup McLeod went with her, or, if not with her, let us say went also. Do you see what trouble that may mean?"

The owl eyes blinked twice.

"Couple o' hot ones!" His voice grew hoarse under emotion. "A woman's pipe dream of an independent kingdom in the Hills, plus a man in a rage at injustice! And the emir in Kabul?" He whistled.

"Suggest anything?" asked the commissioner. "She may be intending to join the emir. If reports are true, he thinks seriously of invading India."

"The Emir of Afghanistan is married. The ex-Ranee of Jullunder is a one wife woman," said Tom O'Hara.

"Isn't McLeod a possibility? Might she not be in love with him—and he with her?"

"Hell, I said it! She'll have half Asia

at her back in no time. What's the use of having men like me and Jimmy Oxshot, who do our work like a nursemaid combing Katie's hair for hen lice, if you're to let 'em slip through after we've given you the info all in black and white? I told 'em about Gup McLeod six weeks ago. All that man needed was a job o' work. I said it. I said, 'Put him in charge of a leper colony, or set him to catching dacoits. He'll go wrong,' I said. I wrote it. I snaffled a snooty reprimand. I was told to mind my business."

"Too bad, but such things happen in the occasional confusion of inter-departmental business. With your present understanding of the situation, what do you suggest can be done?"

"There's but one thing to be done. I'll do it. I'll go after them."

"When can you start?"

"Now—one hour."

"How many men will you need?"

"None. Pick 'em up beyond the border. Take 'em from this side, they tell who you are. Provisions, tents—they steal your canned stuff and they shoot you for the value of the tent. Let me draw about three thousand rupees, paper money, and I'll just melt over the border. You won't see me again until the job's done. But don't send Jimmy Oxshot after me. He's too good. We can't work together. We're singletons. We spoil each other's game."

"You'll try to send word, of course?"

"Try hell! Soon as I've news I'll send it. And my long leave's due, so you may bet your boots I'll not let grass grow under mine. I've a date with a girl in Copenhagen, and if I don't keep it some good looking devil with a million pounds may wipe my eye."

"Then you'll go at once?"

"I said it."

* * *

And yet—all forces and all substance and the poles
Of Fear and Valor and the measureless degrees
Between—aye, folly and unfaith and sunless holes
Within the rind of rancid humor, and Regret—
Aye, sin itself, are parts of the All-seeing. These unfold
Life out of death, death fading from the Light within,
False glitter falsely leading to the unguessed gold.
There is a value even in disaster, so a use for sin.

CHAPTER VIII

"THE SNAKE'S HEAD. AND, BY ALLAH, WAS THERE EVER SUCH A SERPENT?"

EMOTION produces fatigue more swiftly than physical strain does. Gup McLeod did not realize he had missed a night's sleep and had ridden more than fifty miles, until Rahman drew rein in the midst of a jumble of boulders that provided an almost perfect camp site. There was no camp—only Pepul Das and three camels. Perhaps the natural environment suggested tents, and they in turn suggested weariness. Gup knew he was tired, all at once, to the verge of hysteria, which assumes almost as many disguises as there are individuals to suffer from it. It made him afraid of fear—afraid to yield to anything less all-conquering than death. A long sleep might have brought in its wake a calmer view of his difficulty; he might have realized he had friends who would believe his story, or who would at any rate pretend to believe it for the sake of saving him from Glint's notorious malice.

He might have been willing to camp in that spot, had Rahman offered. But Rahman had roped and trained too many horses to be in doubt for a moment what course to take with this mere human he was handling. Doubtless he and Pepul Das were also weary, and the horses had had enough of it; but weary horses, with their girths loosened, can still follow, and men can wear down any animal that breathes—including one another.

"Where are my tents and horses?" Gup demanded.

But that was habit, Scotch frugality maintaining that a man should keep strict account of his own possessions; otherwise they soon belong to some one else. He did not really care.

Pepul Das glanced at the pupils of Gup's eyes, then at Rahman, who nodded.

"In a safe place, *huzur*. I will lead you to them."

"And my servants?"

Rahman intervened.

"*Huzur*, if a servant can follow his master, he is good; he may himself become a master. If not, he is no better than a bedbug, in love with his own belly, sucking the blood of this man until the next comes along, whom he will suck more skilfully. I took the liberty of ordering those servants tested and, lo, they are not. By Allah, they are probably already buying false testimonials in Peshawar, unless Glint's informers have arrested them. It may be they are being whipped in secret, like corn on the stalk, for evidence against your Honor. Let us ride on."

Little things, like last straws, seem the most overwhelming. Gup had no particular affection for his "bearer" and three dissolute *saises*, who had to be watched to prevent them from selling the horses' corn; he had not even intended to keep them any longer than it would take him to find better ones, and there could hardly be worse. But their loss now seemed to take away the last remaining vestige of his honor, in addition to the obvious fact that his having deserted them would add one more link to the circumstantial chain of evidence against him.

"Did you pay them their wages?" he asked.

"No," Rahman answered. "For, by Allah, who are we that we should use your Honor's money? And unless the money that was in your Honor's trunk is there yet, Pepul Das shall learn how his flesh feels without a covering of skin."

Unpaid servants! What an opportunity for Glint to get in caustic asides about his not being even a gentleman! And an unpaid club bill, he remembered. They would post him at the club, he supposed, and then summon a special meeting to cancel his membership. He began to feel dirty, not realizing that he only needed a bath; the sweat and the dust from the long ride felt like moral dirt.

"Let us go," said Rahman.

Gup mounted a kneeling camel. What did he care? He watched with a sort of numb detachment while Rahman overcame the stallion's objection to the hated smell, fastening both horses by a short line to the knob on the camel's saddle. Then away, with the velvety, rhythmical swing that eats up distances as nothing else on earth does. Those were trained Bikaner camels—gaunt, unlovely specters grumbling at survival from the æons when there were no men to make them earn their fodder. There was nothing awkward in their awkward looking gait; they had been trained to waste no motion and to use not one unnecessary ounce of energy. Each cushioned stride went forward all the way and, because it is only waste that sets up inconvenience, the movement was elastic and almost hypnotic. Gup slept fitfully.

It is easier to sleep on camel than on horseback, if the camels are not baggage beasts. But such sleep, waking in starts at intervals to grab the saddle under the impression he was falling, became a series of disjointed evil dreams, not restful to the body, and a dozen times more wearing of mind than waking speculation would have been. The narrow gorge into which they passed, near sunset, resembled the pictures of Dante's hell gate, with nothing lacking except the legend notifying any one who entered to abandon hope. Deep gloom already filled the gorge, whose ribs of gneiss and limestone took fantastic shapes.

A dark sky, bellying with low clouds, dimly reflected the sunset and made darkness visible. The formless, first beginnings of the night mist moved on the evening wind like stuff from which

shivering phantoms gather veils to hide their nakedness. Suddenly, as the sun set, a splurge of angry crimson spread itself against the belly of the clouds, filling the gorge with red hot color that, nevertheless, held no heat, only horror. And then night, full of startling mysterious sounds, and a cold wind sighing amid crags and caverns.

THERE was a short halt, hardly remembered afterward, at a place where Rahman left the horses to be fed and brought along later; meanwhile they were stabled for a good night's sleep in a low, warm hut well hidden behind one of those fantastic limestone spurs that look as if Titans had built them to keep mountains from falling in and filling the Himalayan gorges. Black bearded men with rifles and bandoleers, and with unexpected khaki uniforms beneath their sheepskin coats, appeared from nowhere, answered Rahman's greeting with curt monosyllables, did their appointed task and vanished. Somebody brought Gup a stale *chupatti* that he munched without tasting, eating without knowing that he ate. Then on again.

Interminable, echoing darkness—sky invisible—a hint, perhaps subconscious, of enormous walls on either hand—sense, rather than sight, revealing measureless chasms, now to the right, now to the left, that echoed to the rattle of stones displaced by the camels' footfall—hollow, lonely echoes, sounding like voices of souls in search of the bodies that no friend had buried. Once in a while came a burst like laughter as the wind struck the mouth of an unseen cave and blustered, buffeting the backflow. Now and then Rahman, over shoulder, always repeating the same phrase:

"Soon—soon now, *huzur! Aiee*—but what camels!"

There was a hint of daylight, very cold and dimly driving through a gray mist into the ravine, when Rahman at last turned near a bridge once thrown by British army engineers across a chasm in one of the never ending border wars. The bridge had long ago fallen in. Rahman turned toward a mass of tumbled boulders, where no road led. Ages ago a limestone cliff had fallen, leaving a slope with neither track nor foothold, except where the larger boulders lay around the base. The mother of all fallen rocks lay nearly smothered under débris at the north edge, close against the cliff, and it was toward that, urging the grumbling camels, who hate uneven ground, that Rahman guided the procession.

Presently, in the dim light, Gup could see there had been recent blasting. Earth and débris had been scattered to hide the new, raw, telltale splintered rock, but the weather had not had time to work on it and town eyes could have seen there was a new cave, or a tunnel or shaft of some kind driven into the cliff face somewhere close at hand. There was almost a mine dump in miniature, although some one had been at great pains to disguise it, and it might not be long before wind and rain made it unnoticeable. Rahman grinned. He gestured. Here was a keyhole such as pleased his Afghan heart—a new way, not on survey maps, that penetrated into unknown vitals of an unseen mystery. Eyes that were bleary and red from lack of sleep revealed a glitter in their depths; and even Pepul Das, bone weary and chilled to speechlessness, stiffened his back on his camel and found the grace to grin. Gup saw no signs of human life, although he stared about him when he thought he heard a breechlock click.

Between the huge, square fallen rock and the face of the cliff, as they drew nearer, a narrow cleft opened. It was barely wide enough to let a loaded camel pass. They followed that for fifty yards; it was V-shaped, open to the sky, and on the left hand side, some twenty feet above the ground, was a ledge on which boulders and stones had been placed ready to be pushed over, either with the idea of crushing unwelcome intruders or, as seemed more likely, to conceal the road

bed. It was at the end of that fifty yards that all the blasting had been done. A hole, very skilfully masked by a dike in the face of the cliff, had been hewn and blasted until it reached a natural, wide fissure, whose smooth floor proved it once had been a subterranean watercourse until volcanic upheaval or earthquake turned the water elsewhere, or dried it up.

It was long and winding, but not totally dark because in places the fissure opened to the sky. In those places further blasting had been done, to get rid of rocks that had fallen in. In two or three places they were obliged to duck their heads to avoid a low roof, but there was generally ample headroom and in places the echoing darkness overhead sounded and felt like the hollow core of a vast mountain, black with bats. The ceaseless moaning of a chill wind deadened the camels' footfalls; it blew in their faces, slightly tainted with the smell of dung and wood smoke; and the smell suggested welcome warmth—a suggestion that made sleepiness a torturing, almost overwhelming weight on watery eyes.

Gup estimated the length of that passage at nearly half a mile before it opened into a draughty cavern, water worn and glistening with stalactites.

"The snake's head!" Rahman shouted. "And, by Allah, was there ever such a serpent?"

The shout seemed hardly louder than normal speech; most of the sound was swallowed by the strange acoustics of the domed roof. Except for the height, the cavern was not unlike a hollow snake's head; light streamed in through the low, wide mouth and there were gleaming fangs of stalactite to strengthen the illusion. The long passage they had traversed resembled a snake as much as was necessary to set Moslem imagination working. Rahman began reeling off an endless myth concerning a saint devouring serpent that had lain there since the dawn of time, only to be slain by a descendant of the Prophet who had charged on horseback into the fire belching mouth and had been coughed forth into paradise by the dying reptile's final spasm.

"Jonah and the big fish were nothing compared to it. And I will show you this saint's grave," said Rahman.

GUP hardly listened. Riding between two stalactites, on a camel that slipped on glass smooth stone, he stared three thousand feet into a gorge whose edges were a mile apart, and whose length and breadth were strewn with rocks that looked like monstrous, lime white skeletons. It was only for a few minutes that he could bear to look at them; then the sun peered in over the rim of the gorge and the whole interior became a furnace of white fire, intolerable.

"Cover the eyes!" commanded Rahman. "By Allah, there is many a blind man begging bread, who looked too long on this sight! Cover the eyes. I lead the way."

He even tied cloths on the camel's heads, making fast the nose of Gup's beast to the crupper of his own, but he left Pepul Das to take care of himself. He found a long stick in a crevice, and with that in the same hand that held the camel's nose rope, guarding his eyes with a cloth hung over his left forearm, he gingerly led the way downward along a track fit for goats. It varied in width from one to three feet. There were places where a camel's right flank rubbed the wall while his left flank overhung the precipice.

"And they are bad brutes at this downhill work," said Rahman, grumbling over shoulder. "Put a foot wrong and they perish! Below there are the bones of a hundred camels—and of horses—but of mules not one! *Insh'allah*—if God wills—we shall nevertheless not die until the appointed hour."

On a ledge where there was room for all three camels to stand side by side Rahman paused to rest himself, and Gup saw fit to demand more knowledge.

"Do you mean to tell me my tents and horses came by this road?"

"By my beard, no! There is another way in, easier, though much more difficult to find."

He led on, crossing a crevasse by a bank of débris two feet wide, where a false step by man or camel would have dropped them on to crags a thousand feet below. An eagle flew alongside, watching them, poised like a swimmer, his bright eye hungry.

"Many a camel and man that beak has ripped," said Rahman, stooping to throw stones that made the eagle swerve and rise a hundred feet. "May Allah slay the lousy bird and let me live!"

As he led he kicked loose stones over the edge, until Gup cursed him because of the irresistible fascination of watching the stones descend, but Rahman shed the hot speech like a boxer avoiding a blow, with a duck of the knees and a roll of the neck.

"And if I kick them not away, how long will a blinded camel go before he slips on one of those? And then what?"

On another ledge he said his prayers, spreading out his saddle cloth for mat and turning toward Mecca, first using dust from the cliff in place of water for the ritual ablutions and then reprimanding Pepul Das for lack of piety.

"Ungodly fool! If Allah pleases, we be all three dead men at the next turn! Pray, thou, that this unbeliever bring no judgment on our heads."

He prayed with dignity, with the devout, whole hearted candor of a strong man on his knees confessing his own weakness in the face of the inscrutable. Then:

"Lie-abed sots and infidels are those sons of unwashed swine below there! No fires, none to greet us! Self-respecting men, aye, even sons of emperors would have come thus far to meet us on the way."

Gup mentioned that he had smelled smoke in the passage that led to the Snake's Mouth. Rahman chuckled.

"Look back and upward, *huzur*. If you and I had such a hiding place as this, would we leave it unguarded? There were a hundred rifles within ten strides of where we looked into the gorge just now to see the sun rise. There were ten men watching when we turned into the serpent's tail. Look backward now."

On a ledge like a giant's outthrust lower lip, in silhouette against a bright blue sky, Gup saw the shapes of skin clad riflemen, like vultures squatting in a row.

Curiosity swept over him then and awakened in him something almost like interest in living. At first he resented it, in the way that some sick men resent attention, but every wholesome natural instinct rallied to his aid and within a few moments he was actually hoping he might get safely to the bottom of that ghastly trail, in order to learn the secret of this guarded valley—or rather chasm; he could see no inlet or outlet. It appeared to be a huge hole several miles in circumference, with a floor of quartz and mica and with walls of discolored limestone.

As they drew nearer the bottom the glare grew less because of the shadow from the eastern wall and it became possible to distinguish objects, notably an irregular line of dead trees that appeared to follow a dried up watercourse. What from the summit had looked like giant skeletons became enormous boulders lying in confusion. There was not a vestige of life anywhere in sight, except for those guards on the ledge near the summit; even the lone eagle had vanished.

However, presently, almost a thousand feet yet from the bottom, the track they were painfully following plunged into a wide, dark hole and the camels seemed to know that place; they hurried, the one in front so close on Rahman's heels that he had to use the stick to hold it back. The camel pranced, backing away from the stick, crowding the beast that Gup was riding, forcing him to the edge of the track, where a rock rolled loose under his weight. For a second he hung by the nose rope. Gup jumped for his life, seizing the other camel's leg and swinging himself up on to the track. The camel resented that leg hold and kicked, but the kick went wild because the nose rope

broke that same instant. Gup's camel dropped into space, a somersaulting, incredible looking nightmare of neck and legs. The sudden release of the strain sent the kicking camel reeling against the wall, where he almost fell on Rahman, who said something about kismet.

WITHIN a minute there were vultures visible against the raw blue sky. Rahman leaned over the edge of the precipice, staring. He spat, then glanced swiftly sidewise to see what effect the narrow escape had had on Gup, who was busily rubbing a bruised knee.

"By Allah, what is bad for camels may be good for men!" he muttered.

Gup was actually feeling better. The shock had revived his nerves and sent blood surging through his veins again. He got to his feet and mounted Rahman's camel, swinging himself up without waiting for the beast to kneel. Even many camelmen can not do that.

"Lead on," he commanded.

"Allah!"

The accent was on the ascending note of the final syllable. Rahman led the way in silence and Pepul Das, on the camel behind, began singing a high falsetto Hindu song about the birth of Krishna until Rahman turned and cursed him into silence.

Then they plunged into darkness through the hole in the face of the cliff and the camels had to be struck to prevent them from trotting off toward some cavern that they knew, where food awaited them. There was a sound of rushing water and a smell of stables. Long before Gup's eyes had grown used to the darkness Rahman was whacking the camels to make them pass a narrow cavern mouth instead of turning in. Then firelight flickered on a rock wall where the tunnel turned toward the right. A hand appeared, holding a lantern, and a hairy face peered around the bend.

"Salaam!" said a hoarse voice, and the word went cannoning along the tunnel until it vanished in the outer air.

And now there was no smell of stables, but the sharp, clean tang of wood smoke and the aroma of coffee. Around the bend the tunnel opened into a great dry cave in which six fires were burning. There were several bearded Hillmen around each fire, one man cooking and the others offering advice. The camels knelt, but none took any notice of them; Rahman and Pepul Das undid the girths and dragged the saddles off; then Rahman, shuffling off his slippers, kicked both creatures on the nose and sent them hurrying to find their own way to the stable. Gup felt in his pocket for a cigaret. He had none. Rahman handed him a package.

"I ask pardon for this discourtesy," he said. "I will attend to it."

He strode into the space between the fires, where he kicked away the empty cooking vessels and the coats of half a dozen men, one coat falling into a fire where it was partly burned before its owner rescued it. All eyes were on Rahman then.

"Now, by my beard!" he thundered. "I will kill the man who does not pay his Honor homage—aye, and before my words cease echoing!"

"He has no rifle. He has no sword," said some one, in the harsh, gruff Hillman dialect.

"He needs nothing when he rides as my guest!" Rahman retorted. "Whose time has come? Who dies first?" He produced an automatic pistol.

One by one they passed before Gup McLeod and did him homage in the sly eyed, upstanding Hillman fashion that reserves opinion but recognizes *force majeure*. There were tall men and strong men among them, but there was none so tall as he, nor any one who stood so straight or whose eyes were so unflinching. He acknowledged their salutes with only a slight inclination of the head.

"Speak!" muttered Rahman, for he knew that Gup's voice had the sonorous depth that Hillmen consider a sign of manhood.

"I will speak when I have anything I

care to say," said Gup, and his voice went booming amid the echoes in the smoke filled roof. "Is there no food in all these hills?"

They hurried then to serve him, spreading a rug on the floor and bringing low stools on which to set coffee, cakes and jam in imported tins—three sorts of it. He sat with his back to the wall and tried to eat his fill before falling asleep; and he noticed that Rahman, for the sake of the implied compliment, ate his own breakfast apart, as if unworthy to be seated on the same rug with his guest. And Pepul Das, in turn, was fed apart from Rahman, served from stolen tableware of a much less expensive make. Then Rahman spoke again, when he had cleaned his beard and finished belching—

"Is his Honor's room not ready?"

A man who had done nothing yet but stand and stare took a lantern and led the way along a passage hewn into the rock. They came to a wooden door that had an iron bolt on the inside. He kicked it open. It led into a cave as comfortably furnished as a hotel bedroom, only that the bed was built of rough hewn wood and rawhide thongs, with fleeces heaped on it. There were enough blankets there for a dozen men—soap, water in a big brass ewer, towels, shaving tackle taken from Gup's own camp equipment, and his own clean underwear spread on a bench, with thumbmarks on the linen in proof that Hillmen had examined and remarked on every detail.

"Your Honor's life is on my head. I will sleep outside the door," said Rahman.

"You may sleep in here," Gup answered.

The Afghan laughed.

"Not if I value peace!" he remarked. "An order is an order."

Gup was too weary to care who had ordered that he should sleep alone. He bolted the door behind Rahman, cleaned himself and rolled on the bed, where he fell asleep almost instantly.

It was not written he shall blunder without help,
So be he blunder manly. Though he meet
All evil; though the grim, insatiable yelp
Of hell hounds following foretell defeat,
Nor in the dreadful darkness can he see new ways;
That very siren voice that bade him sin
Is vibrant with the Law that law obeys.
The man's Redeemer is not yonder, but within.

CHAPTER IX

"I AM KNOWN TO THE POLICE—UNFAVORABLY KNOWN TO THEM."

GUP McLEOD awoke without the slightest notion of what the time might be. He lay for a long time without moving and with his eyes closed, going over his impressions of the past two days and nights. It seemed to him he had been mad. He checked over every detail of his memory, absorbed by the dread that he might have acted in some way unbecoming to a gentleman—his standard of living, lower than which he refused to stoop, higher than which he knew no way of reaching, since he knew of nothing higher. It was nothing he would have cared to talk about; it was one of those conversations that a man holds with himself in solitude.

He decided that, if he was not dreaming, if his memory was accurate and his brain not playing tricks, he could pass his own scrutiny, which was probably more severe than that of other people. It remained to be discovered whether he was awake or dreaming, sane or insane. So he opened his eyes.

There was a candle burning in the room, or rather cave. He remembered he had gone to bed in darkness, arguing that if unknown enemies proposed to kill him he would be no safer even though ten lights should trouble his sleep. The next thing that his eyes met was a table near the bed, on which somebody had laid his revolver and the wallet containing his

money, that had been locked in the steel trunk in his tent. He supposed they had burst off the hinges to rifle the trunk. He reached out and counted the money. It was all there.

"Nothing missing?" asked a voice in English.

He refused to seem startled. He looked in the wallet again for cards and odds and ends, his identification paper and two letters that he valued.

"No," he said. "Everything's there." Then he looked into the eyes of a man with a shaven skull but with a stiff black beard, who squatted against the wall on a Persian prayer mat. "How did you get in here?" he demanded, remembering the thick door and the strong bolt on the inside.

"I am human. I came through a hole. Though I have studied all philosophies and quite a little science, I have yet to learn how to pass myself through solid barriers. Did you think me a phantom?"

"Who are you?"

"Ah-h-h! The proper answer would be, 'None of your damned business!' But the proprieties are ill observed in these disgraceful days. Suppose, then, I lie to you. What shall I say my name is? Would Alam Khan do? Would that make you any wiser?"

Gup got out of bed and pulled his boots on. He was as naked as on the day he was born, but a man can fight if his feet are covered.

"You propose to use fists?"

"No, my feet. I propose to kick you through the hole you entered by."

"When you have a revolver? The weapon would be much more dignified and practical, because I would put my hands up if you threatened me with it, and then I could say I was forced to tell the truth. Not that anybody would believe that; I am too well known to lie in almost any circumstances—an invaluable reputation! It enables me to tell the truth without shaming the devil. Why should I shame the devil? And why should I not enjoy the thrill of being aimed at, without the danger of being shot?"

"Is this a madhouse?" Gup demanded.

"Yes, *bahadur!* One of countless madhouses conducted by Allah for the discipline of men—and women. These are known as the Doab caves, Doab meaning 'two rivers'—doubtless so called because there are no rivers, not nowadays. There never were any but streams that three women could carry off home in a jar. But I annoy you. May I beg you to be calm?"

"What do you want?" Gup demanded.

"To avoid boredom, difficulties, punishment and hunger. I am like all other men in that respect. I also want to be amused, and to flatter myself, since none other does that for me. As to why I am here, that is another question altogether. Business and pleasure are so seldom united in lawful wedlock."

"All right, why are you here?"

"*Bahadur*, I bring bad news."

Gup let forth a mirthless laugh. He could imagine no news bad enough to make his state much worse. He began to dress himself.

"Spill it," he said, pulling off his boots again to pull on socks.

"But suppose I should lie to you?"

"What should I care? Suit yourself: lie, tell the truth or get out of here."

"And if I say nothing?"

"I will kick you out."

"Then I will tell the truth, anticipating you will not believe it. Although I so seldom tell the truth that the task will be difficult. There is only one person to whom I never lie because I don't dare, and that person is not myself, either. I deceive myself whenever possible, since the truth is almost always disagreeable and we learn it in any event too soon. But would you not like to know why I am to tell you this? How shall I make you feel as wretched as I wish unless you believe what I tell you? And why should you believe what I say, unless you know why I say it? And if why I say, then also how I know? Which leads us in a circle back again to who am I?"

"I asked who you are."

"And I said Alam Khan, which was nearly the truth. It is one of my alibi pseudonyms. I am known to the police —unfavorably known to them—by that name in three provinces of India. But I wrote another name on the rolls of Jesus College, Oxford, where I took a bachelor's degree as a spur toward matrimony—Anything, my dear sir, to escape the literary leather flavor of your classics—even four wives and the scandalous title of *mollah!* I am known as the Mollah Ghulam Jan throughout these hills; and as a *hajji*, having been to Mecca; but in Moscow I am known as Faiz Wali—red—red—crimson with the unshed blood of unborn millionaires!

"I made a speech in Moscow for which Lenin himself embraced me, and in proof of it I have his watch that I stole while his cheek was against my whiskers. I would have taken the watch guard also, but he might have missed it too soon. I am known in Paris as Syad Mahmud, and in the United States as Hakim Khan. There, if you should consult the records, you would find that they did me the honor of booting me out of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis and New Orleans. To put it mildly, our opinions differed. I was what I think they call deported finally, but I preferred to pay my own first class fare because it annoys me to be seasick among third class passengers."

"Very well. You're a blackguard. I understand that. Now what's the news?" Gup asked him, pulling on his shirt.

"One piece of news, to you, is that I am the agent of her adorable Highness the ex-Ranee of Jullunder."

"Thought so. Go on."

Gup arranged his necktie, whistling to himself. He was ready for anything now—knew storms were coming—trapped again, perhaps, but a different person from the fool who had a reputation still to lose. All lost, he had it all to win again. Let the struggle begin, and the sooner the better. He pulled his tie so tight he nearly choked himself.

"YOU CAN get to hell out of here, if you wish."

"That would be disobedience to her—lacking, that is to say, even rudiments of wisdom. You have seen her eyes? Her lips? The way her head rests on the regal neck? Her hands? And you suggest disobedience? Oh, my enemy! May Allah with the milk of charity dilute the venom of your mind! I tell the truth instead. The truth is this, *bahadur:* that the Indian government, well knowing there is discontent from Kabul all the way to Amritzar and the Deccan and Madras, well knowing there is unrest in the Hills and that the Khyber might be rushed at almost any minute—knowing, too, that one whose familiar name is Gup McLeod has abandoned allegiance, forsaken his friends and vanished northward after whipping the skin from an officer's back—that crafty and secretive government, notorious for mystifying moves, has sent its ablest spy to track you down and gather evidence against you, possibly to shoot you in the back. Who knows?"

"Who is he?" Gup demanded. "Know his name?"

"The ruthless, red haired Tom O'Hara, he who pulled the camels' noses, as we say, in Waziristan while the war was raging, fooled them so that half an army corps of half trained men held India, while half a million riflemen sat scratching their heads in the mountains wondering what magic Tom O'Hara would do next. You have to hide from Tom O'Hara!"

"Tom's a friend of mine," said Gup. "I'd rather talk with Tom than any man I know."

He cursed himself for saying that. The moment after he had said it he would have given all the money in his wallet to recall the words. He was in a land now where money is to be had for the mere trouble of shooting its owner, but where secrets are the stuff that keeps men's souls inside their bodies, because dead men tell no tales but there is always a chance to coax a secret from a living one.

If they had not known that he knew Tom O'Hara, he might have found Tom and talked with him secretly.

"Damn!" he exploded.

Then he pulled on his coat. He was ready, perhaps more ready than he might have been if he had not let out that secret. Now he was as wide awake and nervously alert as he had ever been in No Man's Land in Flanders. Sometimes a man must pay a high price for the lessons that he learns, and there is no recovering the value given in exchange, nor anything to gain by grudging it.

"What next?" he demanded.

"Ham and eggs! Pig's props embalmed and hen fruit looking at you—so reproachful and so wistful, yet so savory and toothsome. Coffee! Can you smell it in imagination? Come."

He led the way toward a corner of the cave where blankets had been heaped the day before.

"My watch has stopped. What time is it?" Gup asked him.

"Midnight," he answered cheerfully, with a gesture of indifference to time that made his long smock sway like a woman's skirt. He stooped and dragged the blankets farther away from the hole they had covered.

"If I go first, will you promise not to jump on me?" he asked.

"Where is Rahman? I will speak to Rahman before I go anywhere," said Gup.

"Then, either you will follow him northward, or you will stay where you are for a long time. Rahman and Pepul Das have been sent on a mission to convert some sluggards from the evil of their ways. *Bahadur,* there is nothing more remarkable in this world than some people's objection to being hurried into the next, where heaven or hell await them. Would not hell, where we knew it was hell, be better than this uncertainty? And as for heaven—oh, the ladies in our Moslem paradise! And, oh, the emerald trees with golden fruit, by fountains that sparkle with diamond water. Oh, the lazy, lordly life forever amid elegance in useless bliss. How exquisite! And yet men hesitate to kill each other in the hope of being killed. Why live when we may die so easily? Is that why you leave your revolver behind?"

Gup had also left his money on the table, reasoning not unshrewdly. Amid savagery, Moslem virtues are as prominent as their peculiar vices and the law of hospitality is Law No. 1, never broken except by men so lost to all sense of honor and religion that they rank below animals in the scale of consideration. He was a guest, not a prisoner. The more the guest trusts his Moslem host, the more sacred his life and belongings are; but let him make a gesture to protect himself, or let him betray a moment's doubt of his host's integrity, as regards that law of hospitality, and the law may cease to function, being two sided like all other human ideas.

"Lead on," he commanded.

"Put not your trust in money or revolvers, eh? Well, that is not such idiotic counsel as it sounds. Will you pardon me, though, if I make myself responsible? I dread the consequences to myself of some one else's lapse from dreamy altruism. You see, I am a Moslem. You are not. *Ich kenne meine Pappenheimer,* as the Germans say."

HE TOOK the wallet and revolver, hiding them within the voluminous folds of his sash. Then he stepped into the hole and in a moment there was nothing of him visible except his shaven, shiny head. It looked like John the Baptist's on a black platter, the stiff black beard, combed splay shape, seeming to spread outward because of the weight imposed on it.

"Pass me the candle," he said. "I forgot the candle. Or rather, I should say, perhaps, that I forgot your nerves."

Gup gave him the candle and followed him into the hole, where it was easy going for the first few moments. There were rough steps hewn in dry rock; it was neither slippery nor tortuous. But pres-

ently they reached a level platform a few feet long, at the end of which the passage turned abruptly. There, at the round of the turn, the candle fluttered and died in a gust of warm wind. The ensuing darkness was unearthly. For a while Gup saw the image of the candle flame projected, as it were by memory, from the retina of each eye. Then that ceased and the blackness became solid.

He could hear the footsteps of the man who led the way, but sound was relative to nothing and was consequently as confusing as chaos itself. He could feel a wall on one side, nothing on the other; and presently, on his right, from beneath, came murmurings as if there were water flowing at the bottom of a deep well. Panic suggested itself, but Gup could manage that stuff; he had a will like molded iron whenever fear assumed physical manifestation.

"Follow the wall," said the voice in front of him. "One stride to your right and you will learn how hanged men feel before the rope tightens. Step off into nothing—then the next world. Are you curious? Or can you wait until death selects you for the ordeal? Then follow the wall on your left hand and don't stumble. No, I have no matches. Have you? Would you like me to wait while you go back and get some? I wouldn't wait, but I would like to know how you feel about it! No? Well, then, follow the wall."

Imagination invented paralyzing dangers, but the will can control imagination and the reason functions logically when the will prevails. Gup argued that his guide would hardly risk his own neck. Also, he remembered seeing prisoners of war subjected to the torture of imagined danger in order to get them to tell what they know. If that was the idea, there was a surprise in store for some one. He set his teeth, but he rather wished he had kept the revolver; he could have fired it and scared that play actor who led the way, and the flash would have shown him his bearings.

However, it was too late to think of that now; and there was no obligation to lose breath or balance. He could take his time. So he set both hands against the wall and felt with each foot for solid rock before he moved forward.

That way he made reasonably good progress as long as the passage descended gradually and the wall was there to lean against. But presently the downward trend grew sharper and more uneven. Then the wall vanished; there was an irregular, sharp edge and beyond that nothing. Warm air wafted upward, strong enough to move his hair and dry the sweat on his neck and temples. Water's murmuring grew louder and he wondered why there had been no dampness on the wall he could no longer reach.

He noticed a change in the feel of the rock underfoot and stooped to touch it with his fingers, squatting, using both hands for the sake of balance. He found a loose piece and thought it felt like shale but knew it was no use guessing. He tossed the piece away—not far. It seemed minutes before he heard it rattle against rock beneath him, somewhere in the bowels of the earth. Then fear did grip him for a moment; it burst on his consciousness that he could no longer hear the footsteps of his guide.

"Where are you?" he demanded, and his voice went echoing and rumbling like the mutterings of an earthquake into unseen tunnels.

"If I knew where we are I would rewrite history!" The voice came almost from between his feet; it was as startling as his own had been. "We are in some sort of mine, but I don't know what sort, nor who dug it, nor when, nor what they did with what they took out, nor why. But did you think I would leave you alone, to fall down chutes and shafts, to break your legs and arms unless you were lucky and broke your neck first? By Allah, if you thought that, you don't give me enough credit for intelligence! I have enough brains to understand the attitude of my employer and, oh, you don't know how I dislike punishment.

"This is the place where you hold my

shoulders—one hand rather lightly on each shoulder and don't shove—don't cling—above all, don't grip my throat. On the right there is a chasm leading to the middle of the world, and on the left there is one of those vacuums nature abhors; it leads directly to the center of the universe. You notice I exaggerate with truly Oriental restraint, but that is because the path we must tread is less than two feet wide and I am almost as scared as you are. Wait a moment, let me show it to you. Watch!"

HE FIRED three shots from Gup's revolver, from a narrow ledge where he was crouching almost out of reach from where Gup stood. They were like three lightning flashes, thunder following. Fantastic crags and chasms shook, flashed, leaped into vivid being and ceased as suddenly in cataclysmic night. Din like the raging of devils at war with God screamed, shouted, thundered, volleying—revolleying an agony of chaos. It even multiplied its suddenness. It ceased in a silence so utterly still, in a darkness so intense, that all existence seemed to have been wiped out. Absolute negation, without form or future, for a moment seemed all that was left. But there was a sharp smell of burned gunpowder to stir one sense into function, and Gup's eyes remembered. Photographed, sharp and distinct on his brain and now developing as the shock began to lose its potency, was a glimpse of a ribboning path of quartz or malachite, like the top of a wall between two ghastly underworlds, that descended in curves until it vanished in a black hole amid crags in a measureless distance. He had to use that path. He might as well begin.

He felt with his foot, groped his way down the ledge where his guide was waiting and laid a hand on each of the man's shoulders.

"Lead on," he commanded. "And if you shoot again without giving me warning I'll strangle you and push you over!"

"Keep step," said the Moslem. "Left—right—slowly. Don't forget, the path winds and goes downward. I have to feel my way. Left—now wait—right—wait again—left—"

Eternities are also relative. A man can live through one of them in one swift dream. Imagination can invent more horrors in a second than a thousand men can perpetrate in a whole lifetime. Gup imagined bayonets and barbed wire, hooks on the wall of the chasm to catch and rend the sinews of a falling body; eyes, whose light was night itself; hands in the dark, outreaching—hands without substance—shadowy shapes of abstract malice seeking to push him sidewise over the abyss—

"Left—now wait again—wait while I feel the way—right—follow slowly. You are pressing too hard on my shoulders. It bothers me. Left—"

At last the welcoming, stuffier air of a hole in the face of a cliff, with room to stand at ease and take the strain off tautened sinews.

"All easy and simple now," the guide said, in a voice that Gup thought forced. He was glad the other man had felt the strain, too; it made him less self-critical. "Only a long rope ladder now, and the rope is new—a good rope, stolen from the Indian army engineers. Hold my shoulders till we reach the edge, then wait for me until I call from below. If there are two on the ladder at one time it sways and shakes too badly."

A gust of warm air announced the end of a short tunnel. The guide knelt, groped, seized two steel pins driven into the rock floor, swung himself over and vanished. His voice came from below:

"When I shout, take the pins in your hands and let your body swing downward. Then grope with your feet for the rungs. There is nearly a yard from rung to rung—one hundred and twenty of them altogether."

Gup held the rope and felt it swing jerkily. Apparently it was not made fast to anything below, and it was also apparent that the face of the cliff receded so that there was nothing to touch that

might have steadied the pendulum swing as the weight went lower. Thinking about climbing down that thing was worse than doing it; he lay and sweated at the prospect; he would almost have been willing to retrace his steps, except for that ghastly causeway with a precipice on either hand. Arguing that he was stronger and more capable than the man making the descent only seemed to intensify the sense of horror that made him alternately sweat and tremble until a kind of mountain sickness seized him and he lay half paralyzed by nerves that were in rebellion against his will.

And it was worse when at last the guide called to him. He peered over. Somebody had lighted a red light and it served to make the depth look even deeper than it was—a red pinpoint like a distant danger signal on a railroad track. The longer he stared at it the farther away it seemed, until at last it appeared like the tail light of some monstrous thing descending into black eternity. It moved. The guide called him again, but the words were indistinguishable, all mixed up with echoes and misshapen from their contact with crag and hollow.

"Here goes!" he remarked to himself, wondering whether his hands had strength enough to hold his weight as he seized the steel pins and began to work himself over the edge.

It seemed to him he had no physical strength remaining, only will power, and the worst moment he ever experienced was when he lowered himself and began to grope with his feet for the topmost rung. He found it, and the first half dozen rungs were a maniac's nightmare, until he discovered that the ladder was not swinging as it had done when the other man descended. Somebody had made the lower end fast and, though it sagged and shook and swayed, it was not so terrifying as he expected. Nevertheless, he died about three deaths before he reached the bottom and stood trying to look self-possessed.

The guide had vanished. It was not a red lantern but a white one—an ordinary export lantern with a wire bail, standing on the smooth rock floor. The red light came reflected from a crimson velvet curtain that hung by brass rings from a brass rod set into the face of the rock in a recess six paces away from the foot of the ladder. He picked up the lantern to try to see what sort of shaft he had descended, but could make out nothing; the walls, of a stone he did not recognize, rose sheer from an almost perfect octagonal floor for a distance of twenty or thirty feet, after which they appeared to lean outward and were lost to sight.

He examined the curtain. It divided down the middle, revealing a door made of rare wood, unpainted and unpolished; it seemed centuries old but still perfect and had no knocker, bell or keyhole. After a moment's hesitation he decided to use his knuckles and beat a tattoo on it. There was no answer. He tried again, louder.

Suddenly the door swung open and there stepped forth, framed by the crimson curtain, the same Pathan who had admitted him and Rahman two nights ago into the fort below the border. He was the same, but more handsomely dressed; the same, but more sure of himself, more truculent, less genial. He stood with folded arms and with a heavy *tulwar* at his waist, looking rather like a viking.

"And your Honor's wishes?" he demanded.

"Get out of my way before I smash you!" Gup said simply.

The Pathan saluted.

"In the name of God, *bakheir braiyed!*" he said. "Come safely! May your Honor's shadow touch none but friends, and may your Honor's enemies see shame!"

* * *

But evil seeks strong oxen for its yoke;
How shall it plough with weaklings?
Thus the Will
That would not yield to wantonness awoke
New plausible seducing voices. In the
still

First quiet of retreating night
A voice asked: Shall the warrior who lives
Lie idle? Victor, lo, these others' plight!
Thy sword! He only keeps what he has won, who gives.

CHAPTER X

"I REMEMBER THE OLD COMMANDMENTS."

LIGHT after all that darkness was bewildering, and moments passed before Gup's senses could interpret what he saw. There was nothing normal that his mind could fasten on; no sensation that he had any right to experience in a cavern underneath a mountain in a range of the Himalayas. A subtle, musky scent assailed his nostrils. Music, of wood wind and stringed instruments and muted drum beat, pulsed in his ears with a rhythm and melody more fascinating than the scent. It was cool, but without the clammy moisture of the Indian thermantidote that steals the virtue from the sunlight but reveals its dread. And there was electric light—not ill placed, frugally issued bulbs such as even some modern Indian villages can boast, but floods of light upstreaming against a roof of rare, hand finished rock from niches hewn into the walls. The wires were hidden, probably beneath the serpents, carved out of ebony, that coiled along the walls on either hand.

Crimson curtains again at the end of a long passage. A carpet like a beam of yellow moonlight, woven in one piece, reaching from end to end down the exact center of a hewn rock floor, whose vague irregularities suggested ripples on a wine dark stream. Great shields, like bosses, on the walls at measured intervals and between those spears, of an unknown pattern, upright in groups of three. Blue robed, with a golden *sari*, at the end of the passage, standing between the crimson curtains, the same young woman who had met him in the passage in the fort below the border.

"Salaam," said Gup, a little startled by the vibrance of his own voice that he had intended should sound matter of fact and calm.

He possessed in full measure the British instinct to seem indifferent to climax and it annoyed him when his voice betrayed his dignity.

Her lips moved. She smiled and stood waiting. If she had had a thousand eyes he could not have been more uncomfortable as he strode toward her down the center of the golden carpet, wondering whether his clothes looked presentable and aware that civilization and pants have robbed men of the art of walking gracefully. Few strong men, possessed of a resolute stride, appreciate the value even of their awkwardness and Gup felt as self-conscious as on the day when he walked up the aisle of a cathedral to be married to the woman who afterward betrayed his trust. That made him savagely polite, discourtesy exuding through the outer film and made ridiculous, as he was aware, by the scent, the strains of music, the artistic setting and his own complete helplessness.

"Will you kindly tell me where I am and who owns this place?" he demanded. "I have no desire to trespass into anybody's quarters. My guide has left me."

The young woman, smiling again, turned and led the way between the curtains. Following, he found himself in a square antechamber, three times higher than its width, well lighted by a group of dragons hanging from the roof, that sprayed from their mouths and eyes a golden glow on polished walls. Now the music was louder but not aggressive; it was wonderful ancient stuff, composed for instruments that had neither the speed nor range of modern devices, so that its beauty had to be expressed in simple sequence and its variety was longitudinal, not heaped into vertical, clamoring chords. It annoyed Gup. It was peaceful. He was spoiling for a fight. The lilting skirl of bagpipes might have calmed him.

An opening in each wall was concealed by crimson curtains. There was a rug

on the floor from a loom long perished, woven by women whose fingers disappeared into the dust of mid-Asian history; and whither their skill went, none knows. They had woven the story of sunlight opening the pagan riot of the flowers in a wilderness in spring—a harmony of hope that knows no limits, and of faith that knows no fear, yet law-obeying, within natural dimensions. That rug increased Gup's irritation; it suggested sentimental values that experience had stung him to consider worthless.

"Every flower in every field is fed with blood and bones," he muttered. "God, what a farce this life is! Beauty is an insult spat at tortured faces!"

Then a clash of brass rings on a rod as crimson curtains were withdrawn, revealing women in the filmy silken stuff that imitates the colors of the mountain ranges in the waking daylight—more than a dozen women, all young, unembarrassed and without that challenge in their eyes that so many women in rebellion, and always Eastern women, use to disguise their own doubt of themselves. These were not so self-assured as wholly sure of something else, though of what was not hinted.

Gup, angry again, since he was sure of nothing except, perhaps, that women and he had no pursuit in common, bowed and stood still. One of them stepped forward and addressed him in English. It was too good English to have been learned in an Indian harem. She was dark complexioned, with heavy, wavy dark hair, but slim and agile looking; he had seen English girls as dark as she, in Devonshire; he had seen scores of them in Scotland.

"You are welcome, and we're sorry if the stairway was a little uncivilized. Won't you come in?"

He followed her, straight through the midst of a bevy of women who made him feel ridiculously huge, into a room that seemed to have been hewn out from the curving buttress of a mountain's flank. It was fan shaped. The walls were pierced with mullioned windows set with small panes of tinted glass, each window forming the end of a deep recess, so suggesting the ends of the ribs of the fan.

Deep, cushioned seats were around the walls of each recess and beneath the windows; all the walls were hung with draperies of embroidered cloth-of-gold, and on the enormous floor the rugs were piled in such profusion that feet sank into them and movement was without sound. The music seemed to come from a balcony hewn in the wall at the short, squared base of the fan, above the curtained door. It was dark outside; all light came from electric bulbs in unseen niches in the walls.

THERE was only one chair—Chinese—nearly large enough to be called a throne, set on a low platform facing the door, between two window recesses, but there were cushions on the floor in heaps irregularly placed in a wide semicircle, more or less facing the throne.

On the chair, in a peacock colored turban fastened with a spray of brilliants, wearing an embroidered crimson long coat over a golden smock and oriental trousers, with pointed golden slippers on her bare feet, sat the Ranee of Jullunder. Age had not yet touched her with its cynical contempt for enthusiasm; she had years ahead of her of youth and ascending energy before the curve would bring her to the valley of vain longings and the harvest of youth's ambition. And again Gup noticed the old-Egyptian, almost goddess-like expression of her eyes and mouth. If she had worn the serpent on her forehead, with the headdress slightly changed, she might have posed for the portrait of Hatshepsut, daughter of Amon-Ra who sat upon the throne of Horus. Her smile was royal; it betrayed no trace of triumph—only welcome, dignity and wisdom.

"So we meet again," she said. "I consider myself fortunate. And you?"

To save his life Gup could not have answered less than courteously. She was too fine, too full of grace and dignity to be treated as his anger told him she de-

served. It was intolerable that she should have spread her net and drawn him into her presence like an animal intended to be tamed and put to work; but her presence was wonderful, nevertheless. She had shed the vague vulgarity of Lottie Carstairs but retained her charm; she had left behind the Ranee of Jullunder's aim at middle distances, enlarging vision without losing the touch of detail; she had burgeoned, ripened into something new—dynamic and not masculine, self-restrained and almost irresistible. The stuff that had made the London public mad for her was there without its veil of deliberate immodesty.

Gup had to find his voice. It came gruffly, less calm than he wished.

"I am unfortunate. I have to repeat what I said at the first interview. I won't do what you wish."

She smiled. If he could read, her smile suggested nothing but approval, though there was perhaps a trace of recognition of a thing foreseen.

"I keep you standing," she said. "That is not gracious. And I haven't introduced you. Ladies, this is Angus McLeod, better known as Gup McLeod and henceforth to be known as Gup Bahadur, commander-in-chief of my army!"

The women murmured and Gup bowed to them, she watching him with eyes as full of laughter as blue pools are when the wind and sun unite at daybreak.

"You accept?" she asked him, misinterpreting his bow with a provoking, submalicious air of unexpected pleasure.

"No," Gup answered. "I have told you."

"Well, never mind. You can't deny what you don't know. You haven't seen yet, haven't heard. The way to win you is to show you your plain duty. And the way to make you pleased with me is to offer you breakfast. I suppose we must call it breakfast. Do you know what time it is?"

"No, I don't. The liar who led me down the thing he called a stairway said it was after midnight."

"Jonesey did? Then he told the truth for once. It is two hours after midnight."

"Jonesey? I don't know him. The man I mean called himself Alam Khan, and Ghulam Jan, and Syad Mahmud, among other names."

"Yes—Jonesey. David Jones is his real name. He's a Welshman, born in Cardiff. Didn't he tell you he was at Jesus College, Oxford, where the Welsh all go? Some day he will damn himself by writing a true book about the tribes of the Himalayas, but he is invaluable as long as he lets the truth alone."

"He has my money and revolver," Gup said pointedly.

"Oh, no. You will find them on the breakfast table. Shall we go into the other room? I have only two rooms fit for a commander-in-chief to see."

The art of rising to accept a man's arm is a half forgotten dignity, too hasteless for these eager democratic days wherein women run lest men see something first. But a new throne needs old manners; and the aim at doing one thing well implies unconscious ease in all subordinate things. Gup felt himself honored. He did not wish to be, and it annoyed him, but he confessed it to himself in secret. He even wondered, as he walked beside her with his feet an inch deep in Persian rugs, what the fellows at home would say if they could see him arm-in-arm with Lottie Carstairs in a palace hewn out of the heart of unwritten history.

The other women stayed in the great room. She and he alone passed through splendid curtains into a room where silver peacocks adorned the walls, depicted strutting in every imaginable attitude that could display the mystery of their metallic feathers. There were peacocks perched on painted trees and peacocks on the wing across the low curved ceiling.

"Who did this?" Gup asked her.

"No one knows. But Jonesey found it. Jonesey knows every foot of the ranges. It was he who blasted through the Serpent's Tail. He was looking for pitchblende. He discovered this."

"Is he the rogue that he pretends he is?"

"Of course not. Jonesey is a Druid,

who hides Druidism under a mask of imbecility. A reputation for madness has saved his life a hundred times. You know, they won't harm madmen in a Moslem land. That is why so many *mollahs* behave like idiots."

THERE was a table, beautifully laid and laden with fruit from the low lying Afghan valleys. The same deaf and dumb girl waited on them. They sat facing each other in the soft glow streaming from a hidden source and for awhile they said nothing at all, he waiting for her to speak and she observing him, as if wondering which corner of his obstinacy to attack.

"Do you drink wine?" she asked after awhile.

"Not at breakfast."

"I never touch it. It robs inspiration of spontaneity, if that means anything. I mean I hate artificial illusion. I like to think things for myself. I like to do things myself, all new, on my own foundation, without advice or assistance. But that can't always be done, particularly in a land where women are the lawful prey of anybody bold enough to seize them. Paradox is useful. The very fact that women are made to wear veils and are kept in harems makes it possible for me to leap into power. I amaze the Hillmen. I upset all their calculations. But that is a power that will swing again against me when it has reached its limit, which is not yet—but the day will come."

She paused, but Gup said nothing. He perceived the thin end of a wedge that she proposed to drive into his self-control. He preferred eating fruit to answering. She went on:

"It annoys me to have to build on old foundations—tradition and so on; so many of them are rotten—like the treatment of women here, for instance, and the Brahmin rule in India. But I learned my lesson when Jonesey showed me this place. I had had dreams of a fortress built according to my own plans; one that should grow, become a town, a city, and then send forth branches, the way Rome did, only much more swiftly. Don't smile at that; things do move swiftly nowadays. I mean to make a kingdom in the Hills."

"I was smiling," said Gup, "at the thought that things also tumble swiftly. And dreams vanish like smoke."

"Yes, part of my dream went. I let it. I accepted this system of caverns left by some one else, who also seems to have built with a kingdom in view. It is too near to the border, but even that had its advantage; I was able to bring up supplies, luxuries and make the place more habitable. It is very ancient, nobody can guess how old, but in good repair and dry. There is shale here and oil; and the oil has been burning underground for ages. The dry heat of that, and the inrush of air has kept all moisture from the caverns. We use a Diesel system for electric light, and I wish you had seen the fun we had getting that heavy engine over the border without arousing the suspicion of British officers. We draw our fuel from a shallow well and filter it through clean sand."

"Who installed your electric light?"

"Jonesey, with the aid of Russians who had run from the Reds in Siberia. They came all the way over the mountains, starving, some of them wounded, with their feet in rags and without hope in the world except to find some hiding place where they could die in comfort. They were engineers."

A grim suspicion crossed Gup's mind.

"How did you keep them from talking?" he asked. "I mean, after they reached the British border."

"They never reached it." For a moment she enjoyed his horror. "Why should they?" she went on. "No, I did not have them shot. I swore them into my service. Russians are wonderful linguists and if you could tell them now from Moslem tribesmen you are cleverer than I think. They are good men, but you will find they need dreadfully hard work and insolence to keep them from being introspective, which makes them

sloppy and careless. They enjoy being miserable. But they are good men and one of them commands a thousand of my riflemen."

"How many thousand have you?"

Their eyes met. She hesitated, laughed.

"Is that ambition asking," she retorted, "or do you propose to catch me boasting? Or are you thinking of buying pardon from the Indian government by telling them all you can find out about me?"

"You don't know me," he said, "or you wouldn't have troubled to ask the last question. I will never buy pardon. I have done nothing for which any man can pardon me. I would not accept pardon, as you, and undoubtedly they, would call it. I admit no guilt."

"But there were two other questions!"

"Both wrong. I was idly curious. It means nothing to me how many cutthroats you have sworn into your service, unless I should have the opportunity to fight against them. Then, the more the merrier! It never pays to defeat a mere handful of Hillmen. They need punishment in droves—a big, dramatic climax. Then the lesson lasts."

"Very true. But how can you ever fight against my riflemen? You would be arrested and shot the moment you set foot on Indian soil. My dear man, listen: Do you take me for a halfwit? Do you think I hesitate to be ruthless to attain an end, or that I don't know all about a man when I have once set eyes on him? There lies your revolver on that side table. We are alone, but do you think I fear your shooting me? I have no weapon. Yet I am going to tell you now what would make some men want to shoot me without a moment's hesitation. I admire you or I would not waste breath on you. I wouldn't want you if you weren't a man of honor. And I knew I couldn't get you without leaving you no other possible course. Your only alternative now is suicide."

"We will see," said Gup.

GUP WAS beginning to enjoy himself.

"What have you done?" he asked.

A clean fight over a plain issue suited the state of his nerves. If she could be ruthless, so could he. But he did not know what was coming.

"I have sent down into India the proof that you visited me in the fort that night below the border."

"Well, what of it? I've a right to visit any one I please."

"They won't admit that. However, I have also sent the proof that there were emissaries there that night from the Emir of Afghanistan, who is known to be planning to invade India. You didn't know that those men were with me in the fort, but they were there, and who would believe that you didn't know it? Could you prove you didn't know it? Could you prove that against Major Glint? It was to Glint I sent the evidence."

"I have learned not to look for much fair play from a woman," Gup answered. He spoke carelessly, but he felt stung. "On the other hand, I kept my promise not to reveal your plans. If I had chosen I could have gone with Glint and have saved my own good name by ruining yours—telling your plans."

"Do you mind if I call you Gup? It sounds so friendly. I have always thought of you as Gup. You may call me anything you please. Gup, are you so innocent as to believe that the Indian government doesn't know my plans? Do you suppose I would have come so soon across the border, had I not known that the Indian government was drawing in its net to catch me? If I had not had spies in every important government office, they would have trapped me long ago. They think I am in league with the Emir of Afghanistan, whereas I only mean to use that fool. I mean to let him take the blame for invading India and bear the expense and the shock of the first assault."

"I see no ground for suicide," said Gup. "You have blackened my name,

but it was black already. I will find a way of cleaning it."

"But I haven't finished. One of the emir's emissaries fell into British hands. They caught him on his way to take the train southward from Mahmud Kot; he intended to talk with the Sikhs at Amritzar, who are seething with sedition. But I did not wish that idiot to upset all my careful arrangements with the Sikhs, who are ready to support me, not the emir. It was easy to have him arrested. It was easier still to connect you with him."

"How?" Gup wondered.

He was too astonished by the boldness and the breadth of her intrigue to think much just then of his own predicament. He used that monosyllable to keep the conversation going.

"Were your tents and trunks not in charge of Pepul Das?"

"Oh, so that's why they burst my box open?"

"No need to burst it. Your servant, knowing you did not intend to keep him much longer, had had a false key made. He was only waiting his opportunity to loot your boxes and escape. So Pepul Das took the key from him, opened your box and found your wallet, that was since returned to you. There were English ten-pound notes in it. Your name was written on them. Ten-pound notes without your name were substituted. Those that bore your name were handed secretly to the emir's man as a token of support in time of trouble. When he came to be searched, of course, those notes, bearing your name in your own handwriting, were on his person. Now prove you are innocent! Now save yourself from being shot, blindfolded, with your face to a wall. Can you imagine Glint not adding enough of his usual sort of evidence to convict you of treason?"

"No," said Gup. "I think you have me there."

"You admit that? You admit defeat?" She leaned forward and laughed excitedly, her eyes alight with triumph. "It was a long game, first studying you, then watching for opportunity, then arousing Glint's suspicion of you so that Glint would make you indignant and force you to some act of violence that would drive you into my camp. Don't you think I'm patient? Don't you think I'm a rather good psychologist?"

"No," said Gup.

He liked this sort of fight far better than he enjoyed the thought of whipping all the Glints in Christendom. There was nothing tawdry about this; his antagonist was not a hypocrite, nor was he accused of sedition but of too stiff loyalty, a charge that might have deadly danger wrapped in it but that did not make him feel dirty.

"No," he said, "your psychology is as weak as your spirit is strong and your plans are daring. Your argument, too, is as weak as any other criminal's."

"You call me a criminal? Was Napoleon a criminal?"

"I believe he began by being magnificent, sacrificing life and genius in the cause of an adopted country, just as you did. I believe he became a criminal when he let his ambition run away with him, just as yours has. You are offering to plunge three hundred and fifty million people into all the misery and damned cruelty of war, solely because a bewildered and perhaps badly advised government refused to recognize you as a ranee."

"That is false!" she said angrily. "If they had put a man in my place, who would have carried on what I was doing, I would have retired with good grace. They put a rotten scoundrel on the throne instead, who undid all that Jullunder and I had worked so hard to build up. He neglects the state, and he would pawn its revenues tomorrow, if he dared, for money to spend on vice in Europe. So I decided I will win a new throne, from which to begin with a clean beginning."

"At the cost of the lives of possibly a quarter of a million men!"

"Or more! What of it? Would they not die anyhow, sooner or later? Which is better for them? To die nobly in a great cause, or to die like rats, of plague and cholera? God kills us all in due time —don't forget that."

"In due time, yes, and let God answer for it. You are offering to run God's business, aren't you? You are willing, more than that, you are determined to shoulder responsibility for the life or death of millions. Good psychology? Rank bad!"

"Are you afraid?" she asked.

"Do I appear afraid? The answer to your proposal is no—flat, downright, without qualification, and forever! Now what?"

"Do you realize that you are in my power?"

"Perfectly."

"Do you realize that if I should send you back below the border you would be arrested, tried and shot for treason?"

"Probably. Something of that sort."

"Have you any notion of the extent of my wealth, and of the rings within rings of influence that I have built up?"

"I'm not interested. I simply don't care."

"Can you imagine how important it is for me, and how determined I am to obtain the services of a man of valor, whom I can admire and trust—a man of merit, who can't be blackmailed, bought or stolen?"

"If you are to succeed, that seems essential."

"You seem to me to be that man."

"Why, then, try to blackmail me?" Gup asked her—and she caught her breath, as she might have if a rapier point had pricked her near the heart.

"I offer you," she said, "a quarter of a million pounds, the office of commander-in-chief of an army of a hundred thousand men—and the title of prince."

"I am not even tempted."

"I am! I am tempted to use means that would bend that stiff spirit of yours or break it."

"Bent or broken it would not be worth much," Gup retorted.

She leaned back in her chair and looked at him across the daintily laid table, where the coffee was cold in the cups and the food was barely tasted.

"Take a cigaret," she said, "and think it over. You might do what Akbar did. He conquered India and made it prosper. Help me to build a kingdom in the Hills!"

"All that Akbar did has perished," he answered. "There remains his name and nothing more."

"A man of your spirit must do something," she said. "What do you want to do?"

"Nothing," said Gup. He grew suddenly downcast. All the disgust with life that he had felt in recent months returned to him in one almost overwhelming wave. "I only know I loathe what I see around me and I don't know how to change it."

The deaf and dumb girl opened the door between the two rooms for a moment. Music, with a muted drum beat, stole on Gup's ears, strangely stirring stuff. It ceased as the door closed.

"I remember," he said, "the old commandments—thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not kill."

"There is a new one," she answered. "Thou shalt not neglect thy opportunities!"

"Not bad," he said, "but you can't make it work if you forget the others. And after all, I am the sole judge of my opportunities. I have declined your offer. What next?"

"I will give you one whole day and night in which to reconsider."

"The answer will be no. And then what?"

"If you are still so unwise, I will send you back below the border, where you may face Glint. And I will hold you to your word of honor not to save yourself by betraying me."

* * *

But Truth needs neither drum nor bugle blast.
Within all treason, and all untruth, and all doubt,
Truth is, and lies proclaim it. Neither first nor last
But always, Truth is. Silence or the shout

Of myriads of voices—thought or deed or thing—
Corruption and all change—these make no mark
On Truth; they are no part of it. Above,
Beneath, without, within, not light nor dark
But absolute, Truth is. And Truth is love.

CHAPTER XI

"DID YOU ASK ME TO COMMAND YOUR ARMY BECAUSE YOU SUSPECTED ME OF BEING SLOW?"

THE DOOR between the two rooms opened again, admitting music. It had ceased to be slumberous, circular sound that left off where it started as if life were only lazy variations of an old theme. It had changed to a spiraling, challenging lilt that asserted there are unknown principles and new realms waiting for imagination to explore them. But it hardly needed that to arouse Gup's inward fire. The battle with himself for self-determination might have made him numb, but that was only on the surface. Under that, compressed and consequently ten times strengthened, was the spirit of Scottish Covenanters, never less than eager to accept a challenge, and to which apparent defeat is a spur to superhuman pertinacity and courage.

A nation weaned on uncooked oatmeal, lest the smoke of cooking should betray its hiding place to a foe made cruel by expensive and unprofitable victory, grows rich with hidden assets. Gup's spirit leaped forth out of ambush, not alone; there came with it what always does accompany the stuff that makes men fight. The Clan of Gup McLeod—the unseen products of heredity, climate, history and culture—more deadly in his case because drilled and disciplined, swaggered out from cover with their sporrans swinging and the skirl of bagpipes in their ears.

"So you will send me below the border?"

Gup got up and strode to the side table, where he pocketed his money and revolver, remembering now that there were only three remaining cartridges. He returned and sat down.

"You are a fine woman, a bonny woman," he continued. "You are twice the woman you were when you were Lottie Carstairs, singing across the footlights to make life hungry youngsters like me, and others, lose our dignity. Many a lad's head you turned; many and many a lad left the theater and went looking for a lass like you. Not by hundreds am I the only one who saw the next woman he met, through a memory of Lottie Carstairs—heard her laugh through the ripple of Lottie Carstairs' chuckle—felt her dancing with him as he thought that Lottie Carstairs' lissomeness might feel—and went and married the wrong lass, for your sake! Nor is that all. Many a feckless chiel has gone to worse hell than a wedding for the sake of your bonny blue eyes."

"And you blame me for that?" she retorted.

"I blame myself, who should have known that new commandment that you named just now. 'Thou shalt not neglect thy opportunity.' I should have known that. But a man seems born with blinkers on his eyes."

The ancient Egyptian hint of spiritual longing, that came and went but was never entirely absent from her face, grew now so strong that Gup's eyes narrowed as he watched her. It made his blood leap. It made her ageless—younger by years—older by all eternities in grace and value. She was several years younger than himself; at moments she was almost a child to his eyes, healthy, spiritual, only waiting to be caught and guided into golden womanhood.

"I should have known," he said, "what I know now. I should have known that the way to power is through song and smiles, not railing at abuses. I should have learned from you the trick of winning people's hearts—and so their confidence—and so their votes. I might have changed the world!"

The Lottie Carstairs chuckle that had once made London hearts feel gay in the London fog answered him.

"It is nice of you not to speak of Jezebel and the woman o' Babylon," she said. "Most Scotsmen do when they reprove a woman."

But her banter increased his vibrance. She could see the veins and sinews of his strong hands that gripped the table edge, and her own blue eyes betrayed some other thought than ridicule. Nor was it fear.

"But I will do my duty now," he said.

Gaily she laughed then—pealing, happy laughter that enjoyed a joke without the scorn that tarnishes good humor.

"With a thoroughly Scottish sense of duty, I don't doubt! You propose to sacrifice yourself for the sake of reforming me? You dour, delightful comedian!"

"Not so," said Gup. "The pity is, I did not fall in love with you in days gone by. If I had, it would have needed more than stage doors and a contract to keep me from snatching you out from behind the footlights. That might have saved the two of us from many a mistake."

"But don't you know," she said, "that by mistakes we learn? We almost never learn anyhow else."

"There is no need to make so many," Gup retorted. "You are making one that I intend to interfere with. If I thought you were a wanton I would leave you to your own devices. I would let you go your own gait to the ruin that overtakes all wantonness."

"Akbar," she said, "Alexander, Cæsar, Cortes, Clive—were they ruined?"

"Spiritual ruin," he insisted. "Though you conquered India, I would not give twopence for your throne. But I will give my life to save India—and to save you for something better."

"For what?" she asked mischievously. "Preaching? Would you like to see me in a doctor's gown, ploughing a sea of prejudices with rust eaten phrases? I have money enough. I could build a cathedral. You might grow a beard and I could make you bishop. But we would have to bleach the beard gray or all the women of the diocese would make me so jealous I couldn't breathe!" Suddenly her eyes blazed, taking up the challenge of the fire in his. "Nonsense!" she said indignantly. "Do you think I am such a weakling as to yield my goal simply because a handsome gallant tells me I should?"

The word gallant stung Gup's puritan pride. In all his life he had never offered a woman less than the benefit of whatever doubt might say of her; and he knew this woman had been no man's light o' love. He hated insincerity. It scalded him to be accused of it.

"If you were worthless," he said, "I would not talk to you. If your goal were worthy of you I would win it; I would give it to you, if I died reaching it. Handsome?" he said. "Handsome is as handsome does; and when I say to you that you shall yield that goal and seek another, I mean no less. I will make you do it."

"How?" she asked, forcing a smile of amusement. She was still indignant.

"I will make you either kill me or else recognize the goodness that is in your own heart! I know what your genius is."

"All wise!" she retorted. "What alchemy enables you to guess? If you had asked I could not have answered. Is my incredulity a sin? I am only a woman, unable to read my own heart. How should you read it, who are after all only a man, unable to govern your own?"

"Only a man," said Gup. "That isn't a bad title. I accept it. It suits me better than that epithet 'prince' that you offered."

THERE was a curtain in the corner of the room behind Gup's back, to his right, a thing like the walls, of silver peacocks. It was through that that the deaf and dumb maid carried plates and dishes. Her eyes glanced toward it and Gup noticed that she shook her head, but he thought she was shaking her head at his scorn of titles.

"You had greater title to men's homage

when you sang for them," he said, "and made them merry for a passing minute, than all the thrones in the world could ever give you. When I said that you sent men astray, I meant this: that I myself married the wrong woman solely because I saw, heard, chuckled with you and craved more of it. Scores of other fellows did the same. You were a decoy for the less lovely of your sex—a peacock acting as advertisement for sparrows! Your fault? Not a bit of it. Who has a right to blame you because men were fools? You dazzled 'em. And, by gad, if we hadn't all been dazzled, we had been dumb images. You are twice the woman now that you were then. You were wonderful then. You are lovable now."

"And you're dazzled?"

She laughed again, honestly—a rippling laugh, all pleasure, and as fearless of danger or its consequences as the light in her eyes was brave and lonely. Even if she did not know she was lonely, Gup knew. He had plumbed the depths of that stuff.

"No!" he retorted. "I am not the fool I once was. I have paid in agony of mind and body for the right to say that, so I can say it without immodesty. But all Asia is full of fools, and you know it. In those days you were innocent and fools were dazzled at their own risk, because you had no designs on 'em. They paid the piper and you sang. But today you're proposing to dazzle the fools and send 'em roaring down to death, for the sake of the peacock throne you see beyond a crimson battlefield or two. I am here to prevent that."

"You are rather a breath taking person," she said, watching the set of his shoulders and the angle of head and neck, that is earned, not bought by any one.

"I will take more than your breath," he said calmly. "I will take your dream of an empire from you."

"Does it occur to you that you are rather swift in your decisions—a trifle bold?" she asked.

"Did you ask me to command your army because you suspected me of being slow and timid?" he retorted.

She laughed again.

"You tempt me. You do, indeed. I might perhaps forego a kingdom, even for a republic—if you would command my army."

"Tempt you? I tempt nobody. It is the honesty in me appealing to the generosity in you. That isn't stuff which butchers deluded fools for the sake of titles and a rent roll."

She glanced at the curtain again and shook her head.

"Brave words, Gup. By the way, why did they name you Gup?"

"I had a dog by that name. He ran with the regiment. He died fighting an animal twice his size. The nickname stuck to me—no reason."

"No," she said, raising a napkin to her lips, "there appears to have been no reason for it. Do you recall, about an hour ago, admitting you are at my mercy?"

"Mercy was not mentioned."

"In my power then."

"That was before I realized that you have too much natural generosity and nobility to behave like a scoundrel. You are probably a victim of bad advice."

"And if I deny the impeachment?"

"Denial makes no difference to the truth. I read it in your eyes."

"Incorrigible Scotsman! Must I prove my power?" There was a threat on her lips but he interrupted it.

"Yes. I haven't heard you sing since the London days. Come where the music is and sing to me. Do you remember the song that made even old ladies rise at daybreak—until for pity's sake you sang 'em another one about 'taking it easy—easy, easy—what's the use of rush?' How did the other one go?"

He hummed it:

"Up in the morning early, girly, dawn is on the dune;
Come and avoid the hurly-burly, twitter the birds a tune!
Trip the light fantastic, so elastic in the dew,
Twiddle your toesies where the roses blush to see the view!"

"Yes," she said. "Silly stuff, wasn't it? But it used to stop the show. I've heard a Kru boy singing that song as he came up from the bunkers of a P & O and once I heard it sung by a Baluchi camel trader on his way down the pass from Tashkent. They tell me the poor fellows sang it in the front line trenches when they stood up to the knees in freezing water."

"They did," said Gup. "I sang it with 'em. Go and change those clothes, put on something civilized; then let's go into that big room and you sing it again for auld lang syne."

"I never sing nowadays," she answered. "I haven't sung since poor Jullunder's heart broke and he went to see what honesty and high ideals buy you in the next world."

"That," said Gup, "is what's the matter with you! Sing again and you'll have better dreams than war and a throne raised on a heap of skulls. Come along. Come and sing to me."

"Listen!" she said. "You're a warrior yourself, with bishop's boots on, and they don't fit. You talk to me of honesty. Is there no splendor in it? No conquest of danger? No glorious aim at the impossible? No hitting it and pinning it to earth? No triumph? No imagination? No daring? No recklessness? Is honesty a mawky mess of platitudes on tinsel paper in a penny frame?"

"It's gra-a-an' stuff," said Gup, "but I can't define it."

"And you talk of skulls, as if the world weren't strewn so thick with them that you can't step unless on dead men's bones. There isn't a government on earth that wasn't born in the agony of war, just as you were born in your mother's travail. War would do Asia good. It would make men out of mad philosophers. They have degenerated, because they are not allowed to go to war with one another."

"Piffle!" Gup retorted. "Come and sing."

His aim was as true as his eye. He had seen her weakest point and shot his dart straight into it.

"Piffle?" she said indignantly; and now there was no trace of humor in her eyes. "I appear to you ridiculous?"

He glanced around at silver peacocks on the walls.

"They're gra-a-an' birds — at what they're good for. None better."

"You consider me—"

"Adorable!"

"—a vain creature without—"

"Peacocks can't sing. Come and sing to me."

"So you refuse to take me seriously?"

"I am deadly serious. Who isn't when he realizes he can do some good in the world? You have made life worth living. I was like a dead man when I entered here. I couldn't see the use of living. But from now on, watch me!"

"Watch you? I wonder whether you suspect how minutely you have been watched?"

She was showing him her worst now, and Gup knew it. He was no such fool as to suppose she was without flaw, and he was glad to see her weakness. He knew, too, she was not yet conquered. Not for nothing had he fought himself and schooled rebellious horses; he knew at least a little of the art of conquest. Besides, he knew he had a mean streak of his own, so he demanded perfection of no one else.

"Why," she asked him, "did you get up and get your revolver just now?"

He laughed—two monosyllables.

"That's not an easy one to answer. I suppose that's when I crossed my Rubicon. That and the money are all I have at the moment. When a man decides that he sees a life's job looking him in the face, there's an instinct that goes with it—an instinct to gather in all resources, no matter how small they are nor what they are. Something is better than nothing."

"You didn't propose to yourself to threaten me with it?"

"If I had proposed that to myself, I would have done it."

"Let me show you then what would have happened."

She stood up. So, of course, did he, his face grave and courteous but his eyes alight with humor that had not looked out from them since two-thirds of his regiment was wiped out at the Marne. He watched her walk toward the silver peacock curtain. Facing him, finely dramatic, her eyes sulky now with assumed indifference, she snatched the curtain open with a clashing of brass rings on an iron rod. Jonesey—the *mollah* bachelor of arts, the Moslem Welshman—stood there with his black beard on his chest and in his hand a British army service automatic. Behind him, with their backs against the passage wall, stood two slow breathing Orakzai Pathans; they were armed with *tulwars*. Jonesey stepped into the room, the others after him.

"That," she said, "is what would have happened. At a sign from me—"

Gup interrupted her, but not with words. He took the Welshman by the neck and flung him back into the passage. Before the two Hillmen could draw their *tulwars* he crashed their heads together, pulled them suddenly toward him and then hurled them, too, staggering on their heels into the passage, where they fell on Jonesey.

"Why not order them to use their weapons?" he asked calmly. "They are three to one."

"And you," she said, impatient and excited, "you refuse to fight? You won't lead my army?"

"Come and sing," he answered. "That is something that you understand."

She bit her lip. It was he who had done violence, but it was she whose breath came in excited gasps; his eyes that were quiet, hers that blazed.

"Yes," she said, "if you will go into the next room I will join you presently. I will sing you something that I wrote and set to music. That will make you understand me better than any more argument could. And after that—you shall have your twenty-four hours in which to answer me. If yes, good; then in turn I will answer you. If no, I shall be sorry; but so will you be."

TO BE CONTINUED

SHOOT *the* SHOESTRING!

By GENERAL RAFAEL DE NOGALES

THE author of the following article is, besides being one of the foremost soldiers of the South American countries, one of the most romantic adventurers of our day. Born in Venezuela, and educated in Germany and elsewhere abroad, he early became a soldier-of-fortune, fighting in Cuba, on the Mexican Border, in various wars of liberation in South America, and in the World War, in which he served as a Divisional Commander in the Turkish Army.

He is the author of an authoritative critical work on the U. S. Marines in Nicaragua, and his book, "Four Years Beneath The Crescent," is a brilliant and revealing account of Turkish operations in the Near East.

General de Nogales has always cherished the motto: "When you hear of a war, go to it!" Read how he started a revolution with a proverbial shoestring.

IN DECEMBER, 1913, General Moncho Rodriguez, head of the Nationalist party, and myself, chief of my soul, chief of my good intentions, and chief of such brave and angry men as I met on my way, had perfected a plan for the invasion of Venezuela with a view to overthrowing the Gomez dictatorship, then in its fifth year of consolidation. General Rodriguez was to enter the country from British Guiana while I, fortune willing, was to sweep into it at some unexpected point on the Colombian frontier, probably through the plains of Arauca and Casanare.

General Rodriguez, therefore, was to march, recruit and fight westward; I was to march, recruit and fight eastward. We were to meet where luck would have it and then see what could be done. In the meanwhile there would be no way in which we could keep in touch with each other.

When I took my leave of General Rodriguez at a garish Broadway restaurant it was to meet him, God knew when, somewhere under the low hanging stars of the central Venezuelan plain.

The Colombo-Venezuelan frontier is fringed along its thousand-odd miles with Venezuelan expatriates who eke out an existence as honestly or as picturesquely as they can—who nurse their wrongs to a point where they can not be distinguished from the wrongs of their country; and who are certain sooner or later of becoming the government.

They have always become the government sooner or later. And becoming the government in a country like Venezuela is eminently desirable, for the paramount reason that not being the government is hell.

Along this thin line of rebellion quarreled over by a dozen generals I had a scattering of friends, the nucleus of what would come to be known to the outside world as a bunch of bandits or an army of liberators. They were expecting me to turn up at an undetermined time in

some unpredictable place. The Colombian government, which has to export some half million sacks of coffee through the Venezuelan port of Villamizar, has an agreement with Venezuela to keep watch on revolutionary activities along the frontier. An attempt is made to keep this agreement strictly, in spite of the fact that many Colombian officials have a soft spot in their hearts for our revolutionary cause.

I was therefore warned not to approach within less than forty leagues of the border under penalty of arrest, which compelled me to begin operations alone and deep in Colombian territory.

The warning was communicated to me by an elderly colonel in the sweltering heat of a Barranquilla café, whither he had invited me to have an ice cream soda. The colonel expressed his private opinion of Gomez, apologized profoundly for his duty and ended by telling me that he had been commissioned to keep an eye on me, but that at that moment he intended to go home for a siesta.

I took the hint and within two hours was steaming up the Magdalena River in a wood burner under an immense cloud of smoke, and also, I observed, under the eye of a certain employee of the Barranquilla consulate who developed a desire to play monte with me for extravagant sums. I played him penny ante poker instead, and this, as I expected, soon got him to talking vaguely of his importance.

Now, you can not get one of these tropical *gendarmes* to talk of his importance without eventually hearing him refer sadly to the government that employs him. Their importance is so great that it can not possibly be recognized by the present government, though there is always a chance that it might be fittingly rewarded by the next. And who can say for certain along these regions that he is not at a given moment talking to the next government in person?

By the time the boat had chugged three hundred miles up the river I had gathered that my liberty was in his hands, but that, feeling an attack of malaria coming on, he would presently take to his stateroom and stay there until it was over. Through the porthole I saw him drinking a tall glass of hot rum and describing to the doctor something which, from the motion of his hands, appeared to be the hips of some delightful lady. That night I spent in one of the numerous woodpiles that line the shore for the refueling of the riverboats.

Sunrise found my leather bag at the bottom of the Magdalena and myself looking like a peon—sandals, rolled-up trousers, a drab woolen poncho, a machete and a revolver—of the nearby *rancheria* of La Gloria. The most suspicious object about my person was a pencil stub, which I have frequently found more useful in warfare than a six-shooter.

The sunlight being unfriendly to my liberty, and even to my health, I plunged at once into the shadowy swamplands of the Magdalena. For three days I cut my way through the jungle. Then I ascended the plateau, crossed the sierra of Cundinamarca, the scene of one of Bolivar's famous marches, and always avoiding the settlements, I reached the vicinity of Pamplona. Four of my men were waiting in a *hacienda* near the town. They were well equipped and well mounted.

This was the first corps of my army. During the eighteen days of our dash to the Venezuelan frontier three of them were to become members of my staff, and one the orderly. They knew the country as thoroughly as I did and could easily develop into good officers as long as the fighting took place in the peculiar forest and swamp regions with whose tactical possibilities they were conversant.

The men who make their living on this perennial battle line have learned to recognize the political mood of the country from its physical traits, somewhat as we divine the intentions of a man from an unconscious movement or an unintended word. It is an Indo-revolutionary lore of one hundred years' growth.

It was eighteen days before we emerged into the savannas of the Arauca, and the

big forest had treated us roughly. Fever stricken, barefoot, our horses gone, our weapons rusted and our ammunition wasted on jaguars and Indians, we took to the vast sea of burnt grass like wild beings released from a cage of trees. Hardly anything, beyond bad health and a revolutionary purpose, distinguished us from the fauna of the jungle. Under such circumstances, an army of a thousand men might hesitate, a council might be called, a debate might be enjoyed. But for what earthly reason should four men hesitate? We decided to see the thing through.

Sending a man into Tamé for sandals, I received news that some of my friends were waiting for me there. They turned out to be an old man, Jerónimo Domingo, and his two sons. Jerónimo had been a rancher across the border until the government "knowing of his loyalty and patriotism" had taken it into its head to encamp soldiers on his land. The soldiers liked beef and preferred it fresh, so Jerónimo was compelled to behave unpatriotically and, of course, was hounded out of the country.

Jerónimo, who was a shrewd man, only needed poverty to become a sage. He was now the sage of Tamé, a kind, inscrutable medicine man who had acquired a few head of cattle and occasionally solved domestic problems with dogmatic wisecracks.

He had horses and plenty of ammunition for us. We spent three days with him in a paradise of beds, mosquito bars and beef. Ten men, Jerónimo informed us, were waiting at the small settlement of Cabuyare, near the border. They would have news of the next group.

At Cabuyare I recruited my ten men, fully equipped, but was disappointed at the information that all contact had been lost with the other groups. The Colombian *gendarmerie* had been in earnest in that region.

I therefore decided to cross the border at the first opportunity and raise my army on my own soil. Leaving my men a short distance behind, I paid a disconcerting visit to my friend the *jefe político* of the Colombian town of Arauca. He was a friend, not a confederate. He would not arrest me, but he would not fail to make himself agreeable to his colleagues on the other side of the line by warning them of my presence in the neighborhood of Arauca. He was surprised enough to see me and probably could not understand my visit except, as he saw it, on the grounds of my reputation as a hell of a fellow addicted to the luxury of risks.

That, at any rate, was what I wanted, for upon leaving him I traveled fast to the frontier town of El Viento, about fifty miles down the river. Twelve hours after leaving Arauca I was advancing slowly by starlight on El Viento, whose main street was at that time half Colombian and half Venezuelan.

TWO SCOUTS mounted on white horses to be distinguishable in the darkness, rode a hundred paces ahead of me. The prairie here is broken into small sand dunes, which slow up the march but afford excellent protection to a small force. The air is phosphorescent with swimming constellations of *cocuyos*—fireflies—which give the impression that you are advancing, like a mythical horseman, over an astronomical landscape.

"There is the town!"

One of the scouts had retraced his steps to announce it. A sand dune hid it from our sight for a few moments. Then we saw the dark low silhouette against the crack of dawn.

There was no question of maneuvering. The town was taken in a rush. As we galloped in open formation to the first houses the fireflies swirled upward and sideward like a breaking sky. A few seconds after the sentry was shot I was breaking in the door of the barracks on the Venezuelan side of the street with the butt of my rifle.

There was some shooting from the windows, but the bulk of the garrison, composed of eighty men, fought their way

into Colombia across the street, and were there duly awakened, disarmed and interned by the authorities. They were not in the least interested in the political implications of their defeat, but they were considerably disturbed when they learned that they had been routed by seventeen men.

I spent the day organizing the new government of El Viento. A revolutionary *jefe civil* and a revolutionary customs agent were appointed. No looting must be allowed. I refrained from the pompous custom of establishing a Government of Venezuela on the spot and outlawing the whole republic beyond the vicinity of the village I had captured. No adult aim was to be served by this time-honored procedure, and besides, General Rodriguez might have advanced deeply and successfully enough into the country by this time to have established a working government which it would have been too absurd to duplicate on paper.

By nightfall my force had increased to one hundred-odd men, all mounted and well armed, but inadequately provided with ammunition. I decided to strike with this force at La Trinidad, a cattle town thirty miles to the northwest, and get my supplies from Gomez. There was no possibility of obtaining them along the Colombian border.

Governor Mogollon, of the state of Apure, had shown no signs of activity so far. His position at San Fernando, capital of the state, was probably too strong for him to abandon it. There, as I learned later, he had two regiments and two armored river steamers.

We traveled all that night over the open savanna, a hundred horsemen in close, irregular formation. At the head of them I felt like a lookout on the prow of a ship. Near dawn, being informed by the Indian guide that we could not reach La Trinidad before daybreak, we veered toward a patch of forest—a *mata*—a few miles to our right. It would not do to march by day. After scouting our refuge thoroughly, we made our camp not far from its farther edge. A ranchhouse was visible in the distant haze.

Here I had an opportunity of making a closer scrutiny of my men. They were peons, cowpunchers, river boatmen. A half dozen old *guerrilleros*, wrinkled and toughened in the service of an endless adventure, were personally known to me. They vouched for some of the others. On the loyalty of the rest I counted empirically, taking the chance that always must be taken in these cases, that a common action will readily imply a common purpose. That three or four spies were likely to be found among the troop went without saying. You just have to discount that in advance, keep your eyes open and shoot on suspicion.

No movement of troops whatever was reported by my sentries until the sun was about to set. Mogollon's officers, I suspected, were suffering from the peculiar ailment of the Gomez soldier—bad conscience—and were hugging the towns. The troop sighted about five o'clock consisted of about seventy-five horsemen and was galloping across the sunset. My scout reported that they did not seem to suspect our presence in the *mata* and would probably pass us by. But I devised a better plan.

Leaving a small detachment in the *mata* under the command of El Catire, a bronzed old *guerrillero* with flaming blond hair, I left with the rest of my force through the opposite side from that on which the patrol was passing, and galloped full speed in the direction of the *hacienda*, keeping the trees between me and any possible position the patrol might reach within the time it took me to gain the horizon.

El Catire was to open a scattering fire from the trees, taking care to give the Gomez soldiers an impression of recklessness rather than of strength. To emphasize this impression he was to make a sally from the *mata* at full gallop and, when about halfway to the troop's position, was to turn back suddenly as if he had just realized the hopeless superiority of their number. He was to make a short stand at the edge of the *mata* and

then cross it and follow me. As long as daylight lasted he was to follow my tracks, so as to avoid the suggestion that another troop had gone on ahead, or that two troops were to be dealt with. The government patrol was to believe itself hot on the trail of an easy prey.

In the meantime I would be advancing toward La Trinidad through the night, about ten kilometers ahead of El Catire. It was not my intention to deviate the patrol from my track. I wanted them at my heels. For this purpose El Catire was to make occasional stands along the way. In no case was he to avoid the close pursuit of the government's men. He was not to give their officer the slightest excuse for losing his trail and abandoning the chase. He was to keep in close contact with me through messengers, so that I could at all times know the exact position of my pursuers.

I rode into the courtyard of the ranch-house disposed to capture or shoot all witnesses of my passage, but found in it an old friend, one of the numerous under-cover revolutionists of the region, on whose discretion I could rely. He gave me some food and twelve peons, his whole supply; both, as he said, to strengthen my arm and to avoid blabbing. With my force thus increased to about ninety men—twenty had remained with El Catire—I blotted myself out on the darkening savanna.

THROUGHOUT the night I heard the faint echoes of El Catire's running fight. I was picking my way through the scattered settlements and ranch-houses like a ship among shoals, keeping in touch with El Catire through couriers mutually dispatched every half hour. El Catire was following me in a general way, but was managing to rush through villages and make his stands in the vicinity of ranch-houses. Thus no doubt could be left in the mind of the pursuing officer as to the weakness of his quarry. He would find plenty of informants along the way eager to be remembered by the government, but the stars and the grasses would tell him nothing.

The pass of Mojadito is six kilometers from La Trinidad, and there, according to the courier from El Catire that reached me at about four o'clock in the morning, my decoy detachment was making its last stand. I was on the bank of the river myself, and the ford was three miles to my right. I calculated that it would take the courier to reach El Catire the same time that it would take me to swim across the river, which was deep and swift there. Then I should give myself a ten minutes' start on El Catire and the government troop, which should be allowed to pursue within one hundred paces of its quarry, at full gallop.

El Catire was to mount a small ridge, a mere undulation of the plain, that swells toward the sky within gunshot of the town and, on the descent, swerve suddenly aside. Fearing to endanger the exact workings of the plan by a senseless accident to the courier, I sent two other men with him.

Then I plunged into the river and shouted the command to follow. I had to do this dramatically because of the terrific danger involved in crossing the rivers of that region. They are infested by a deadly kind of fish—*caribes*—no larger than your hand, which swarm in schools of thousands and have been known to peel a body to the skeleton in a few minutes. These monsters are attracted by the smell of fresh blood, and a scratch is sufficient to bring them on. In choosing my last three couriers to El Catire I had selected those whom I knew to have festering wounds. Among the rest of my men not one was visibly wounded, but it was quite likely that most of us, myself included, had scratches on our skins.

However, these men who will not be used as war cattle never shun a risk if their commander takes it first. It is the primitive compelling argument of the savannas, the argument that Bolivar knew so well and that the gold laced, patent leathered, well barbered generals

from Caracas never know how to employ. In half a minute my whole troop was splashing in the quick waters, swearing, laughing, singing hysterically in the face of a danger they were completely powerless to ward off. As luck would have it, the current, flowing diagonally in our favor, threw us rapidly upon the opposite bank. I counted my men and not one was missing.

I immediately dispatched two *llaneros*, unarmed, to warn the garrison of La Trinidad of our approach. They were to say that they had seen us crossing the river exactly where we had crossed it, and that we could not be more than a few minutes away. Those men would, of course, be held as prisoners and, in case of our failure to take the town, would be shot. I selected two men recommended by one of the old *guerrilleros*, and they rushed ahead. For some time I followed their swift figures in the first slight glow of the dawn. Then I gave the word and we advanced. I had deliberately planned to be caught between two fires.

Upon reaching the rise in the ground, which I knew to be about two hundred yards from the entrance of La Trinidad, I came to a halt. Peering over the ridge, I could detect the bustle of activity within the town. My men had given the warning, and the Gomez officers did not have time to deliberate on their possible motive. They could only hold them as hostages to their story and then act precipitately on the story.

The scattering fire of the running skirmish to my right was now perfectly audible. El Catire was converging toward my position with the government patrol closely at his heels. I saw the shadows of the garrison taking positions along the edge of the town. A group broke in the door of a house, carrying what I believed, and hoped, was a machine gun, no doubt to bank it at a window. A woman shrieked.

From behind a patch of trees a large group of horsemen now appeared, a much larger group than El Catire's troop. Either this was something unforeseen, or the fighting revolutionists and *gobiernistas* had gotten all jumbled together. With a sputtering of fire, the head of the troop flowed over the ridge.

Suddenly it swerved to one side under a withering rifle and machine gun fire. It was El Catire. The rest of the horsemen, bewildered, rushed into the fire to be mowed down. In the confusion, El Catire was supposed to regain the ridge.

Without waiting to see if he had done so, I moved rapidly to the left and entered La Trinidad, unopposed, beyond the government's flank. When I galloped on them from the back along the wide street opening on the plain, they were still engaged in shooting down their own men. Caught now between the men of the patrol, whom they could not conceive of be anything but revolutionists, and my own charge, they broke and scurried in all directions.

Many rushed directly at us and were shot down. Others vanished into thin air. El Catire charged over the ridge again, this time in earnest, completing the rout. My men, knowing the inferiority of their number, were in no mood for mercy and they poured fire pitilessly into the rout.

I managed to save a young officer who was waving a brand new sword desperately in an effort to conjure order out of a chaos that he could not understand. Any officer who goes about waving a sword in a Venezuelan skirmish ought to be saved. He may be a good lawyer or doctor later on.

Such government soldiers and officers as we could gather in were locked up in the *cabildo*, up to one hundred and sixty of them. The rest, perhaps one hundred, were scattered through the town, and would presently apply for a new job in my force, thus relieving La Trinidad of a sudden unemployment problem. Toward the western end of the town, where the fighting had taken place, rifles and cartridge belts cluttered the ground like apples in an orchard after a windfall. The machine gun embanked at the window had been shattered by the group of

my men who rushed it; but another one was found at the barracks.

Major Perdomo, commander of the garrison, was pulling his hair in the room assigned to him on the upper story of the *cabildo*, preferably near the windows, as his desperation must be well authenticated. The other officers cursed me for awhile and then began to shoot dice. The two men sent by me to warn the garrison of my approach were found later dead drunk in a *pulperia*. The major had kept them at his side during the fighting, but they had slipped away in the turmoil. The *alcalde* came to offer me a small sum of money in the name of the municipality for my men. I appointed a *jefe civil* to keep order in the town, allowing him ten rifles. Then I gave my men five hours to sleep, one hour to get drunk and two hours to sober up. We were leaving at sundown.

At the telegraph office I found records of vague news of Nogales. He was supposed to be somewhere along the Upper Arauca. The telegraph was useless to me to send misleading messages, as I was not in possession of the countersign and could not rely on the operator to give me the correct one. I dismantled it.

BY SUNDOWN I was ready to push on with two hundred and fifty men, plenty of ammunition and one machine gun. I could proceed toward Palmarito, to my north, or toward Uncein, due east, which would bring me within striking distance of San Fernando, the state capital, which was my objective. As I had to play a rapidly shifting game to conceal the smallness of my force, I decided on Palmarito. From Palmarito, along the Apure, which flows into the Orinoco at San Fernando, there is a good approach to the capital. Mogollon, upon hearing that I was at Palmarito on the direct river route, might divert forces to check my advance on the Apure. In the meantime, I would arrange to be as far from the Apure as possible.

I decided to advance on Palmarito from the west; that is, from the side farthest from San Fernando, touching the Apure on the foothills of the cordillera. That would involve an all night march over the savanna and then a careful approach through the jungle bordering the river. In this jungle I would surely meet bands of obstreperous Indians who might either hinder my advance or become temporary allies, much depending on the quality of the liquor they had been consuming.

All night my force swished along the llanos, slippery now with the first indications of the rising rivers. The plains at the height of the rainy season become immense lagoons spotted with *matas* which resemble islands, and cut by long tongues of rising land which give the impression of sand bars. The Indians at that time emerge from the jungle in canoes and rustle cattle at their will. Only *llaneros* can come near coping with them during that season; the regular government cavalry is quite useless in the flooded llanos.

Along the foothills of the cordillera I was near the border of the state of Tachira, the birthplace of the last two successful revolutions. Eustoquio Gomez, the dictator's cousin, would be waiting for me there with his own Andean people, and it was foolhardy to fight superior numbers in the cordillera. I promptly entered the river jungle, keeping away from the bank, and turned east toward Palmarito.

After marching all day we set up our camp a half mile from the river, in what could be considered a clearing, a place, that is, where four or five horsemen may pass abreast between the trees. Here, I knew, I would encounter an enemy possibly more formidable than all the Gomez armies—an Indian legend.

The "*Macaritas*" are beings that have never been seen by the man that tells about them, but they have been heard by all who cut their way through the western jungles of Venezuela and the eastern forests of Colombia. They emit a low penetrating wail which is at once heartbreaking and weird, and puts you in mind of all sentimental and horrible things:

dying children, hungry vampires, souls in purgatory. The Indians believe them to be the latter begging for prayers. But, with the lack of external logic inherent in primitive legends, they also claim that they take the form of semi-human beings who walk with their feet turned backward and whose females have only one breast.

When the fires smolder the *Macaritas* are said to steal into the camps in search of mates, the females carrying off the men, the males roaming in search of the women who are never to be found in the jungle. There is only one way of warding them off, and that is by planting something containing steel on the ground pointed upward. The legend, I believe, may have its origin in the matriarchal tribes that roamed the upper Amazon at the time of the conquest, mixed with Catholic theology and the fear inspired by the steel weapons of the *conquistadores*.

There was considerable Indian blood in my camp, and men who will fight cannons have been known to be routed by a story. So that there was nothing for me to do, besides building a circle of bonfires and planting a few machetes by the hilt.

But to bring out another story—

Swinging in my hammock that night before a great fire of green wood, with my men loafing in the sputtering glow around me, or attentive on their haunches like eager children, I told of my adventure with a *Macarita*. The *Macaritas*, I had found, were a tribe of excessively ugly hot babies forsaken by love, probably on account of their sins. Nothing worse could happen to a man carried away by them than to be imperfectly reminded of the girl he left behind him. Knowing how easily the understanding of psychoanalysis comes to primitive peoples, I made a Freudian symbol of the knives planted on the ground. A Venezuelan revolutionist may be called upon to change the folklore of his country before he changes its government.

In the morning three of my men were missing, but whether through fear of the *Macaritas* or in search of them, I can not say.

After an early breakfast of *caimito* and coffee, we began cutting our way once more through the jungle. The sounds of our progress were more like those of lumberjacks at work than of a troop on the march. We plodded on as the jungle tumbled before us with something of the effect of a forest under machine gun fire caught by a slow camera. These belts of jungle are dark, silent, primeval forests, with their mass of giant and stunted trees closing into a dusk shot through with a weird sunlight.

Jaguars growl casually at your flanks; monkeys of innumerable varieties follow your trail over the tree tops; gold and black *turpiales* screech and swish their plumage like dowagers, elegant and garrulous. Snakes raise their curious question mark from the ground or hang down observantly from the boughs. Giant blue butterflies, the size of an elephant's ear, flutter in the sun rays and glow in the dark green shade. One of my men discovered an old copper church bell, a forgotten witness of the Jesuit effort at civilization before the jungle crept over the dampness of the savanna.

The Guajibo Indians of this region maraud when they can, and wring what in more sophisticated places is called an honest living out of the river and forest when they must. This was the end of the honest season. The rivers were beginning to swell with the Andean rains; soon the plains would be flooded, the cattle would take refuge in the *bancos* or grass islands and the Guajibos would sail the llanos in canoes, immune to the government cavalry, corralling the beasts in the *bancos*.

About noon we came into an encampment of them, still devoted to the honest pursuit of fishing. Desiring to ascertain their attitude and also to obtain some of their medicine for *raya* cuts, from which several of my men were suffering, I advanced with my hand raised horizontally above my head in token of peace. They were celebrating the arrival of the rainy season. Their sentries, perched on tree tops, let us pass because the Guajibos are very proud of being caught in the act

of earning an honest living, and their drying nets and the piles of fish beside them testified to that.

These Guajibos were now drunk on palm wine. With dry palm leaf crowns on their heads and gaudy daubs on their bodies they were dancing their *guarache* —war ballet—to the shrieking of reed pipes and the slow, tantalizing beating of drums. The chief gave me the medicine at once and then insisted peremptorily that we have a drink on him. This I refused, which made the chief and his people very angry. Their anger is dangerous because they are not afraid of revolvers, which they call "little medicine". They shoot long poisoned arrows which, aimed by elevation, have as long a range as a six-shooter.

I casually made a display of my "big medicine" and even attempted to explain to them the uses of the machine gun— "great big medicine". I pointed out the advantages of joining in an expedition against the big country to the north. But they were getting ready for a campaign against cattle and could not be aroused to interest in a campaign against men. They allowed us to depart, but shortly we became part of the feast, part of the celebration in honor of the great god and accomplice, Rain. Poisoned arrows began to fly about us through a flutter of falling leaves.

Several of us, riding backward on our led horses, opened fire on the closed wall of vegetation. It was a fantastic procedure, this firing at a green wall which shot back arrows at you. Two of my men were scratched. One of them became swollen purple. He died that afternoon.

After a short while the green wall quieted down, the primitive sounds died in the distance and the monkeys above our heads became restful.

PALMARITO I took by circling beyond it to the north and coming unexpectedly upon the small detachment guarding that improbable approach. The bulk of the defense, about two hundred men, were ambushed along the river jungle. Before they realized the anomaly of their position, they were besieging the spot they were commissioned to defend. I fortified myself in Palmarito as best I could and withstood the siege, sending El Catire again up the river, this time along the eastern bank, to catch the besieger in the back. At the same time I sent part of my force south into the llanos, along the line of my retreat, so that they could also attack from the rear any government force that tried to catch me in a similar trap. El Catire did his job nobly, losing eight men, three of them in crossing the river above the government's position. He was a reliable man for this sort of thing, always kept his men at top fighting efficiency and managed to observe the schedules. I do not know whether this was on account of his courage, his revolutionary lore or his yellow hair. Anyway, El Catire had a sort of mystic personality, like that of a rare and humble god, and it was a good thing that the idea of political power was incomprehensible to his gruff imagination.

I bluffed a pursuit of the scattered Gomez men in the direction of the Andes —westward—and, leaving a small garrison at Palmarito to support the bluff, I took my way rapidly southeast to Uncein, crossing the plains from the Apure to the Arauca jungle belt in one night.

Uncein was the last outpost on the way to San Fernando, the state capital, which I could never hope to capture with my small force, now consisting of two hundred and eighty-odd men—all mounted, of course. Therefore, I must not show my strength at Uncein, but rather give the impression that I was attacking that position and San Fernando at the same time. General Moncho Rodriguez must be up to something. I wondered whether his force—bigger than mine because of the greater facility of importing arms through the Guiana and Brazilian frontiers—had already reached Ciudad Bolivar, two hundred miles north along the Orinoco. If so, we might converge at Zaraza, about one hundred and twenty-

five miles from Caracas, in the populous region of the republic—and might arrive at the gates of the capital with several thousand *llaneros* and a number of regular regiments on whose colonels we counted as confidently as one can count on anything under the circumstances.

The *gobiernistas* had had time to entrench themselves at Uncein. They had dug themselves in in a half moon circling the ranch for little less than a mile. This was conscious, deliberate warfare and, like the style in women's hats, a direct importation from Europe. A frontal attack with the small force at my disposal was out of the question. Even the heroic expedient of breaking the line would serve no useful purpose. The idea of flanking them and attacking them from the rear was childish. No officer, however incompetent, given sufficient time and means, as the government unquestionably had had, would fail to protect his rear.

One thing only worked to my advantage —the fact that the *llaneros* are known to be most dangerous when running away. They are marvelous horsemen and ride only the most agile and powerful animals, and they can tire a pursuing detachment into a state highly favorable to their rout. In long running fights of that sort it is the custom of the *llaneros* to run until the government men have to flop into a hasty camp to recuperate. Then, in the dead of night, they send a single horseman to rush through their camp, shoot it up and come out alive if he can. This operation, against which no system of guards is effective, is kept up throughout the night, with the result that in the morning when the *gobiernistas* are ready to break camp, they have not slept a wink, have hardly been allowed to eat and have become as hysterical as Damocles.

On the basis of this tradition, I was quite certain that a serious pursuit of my forces would not be attempted.

I dug my men in, in an open half moon the ends of which, like the government's, receded from the center of the field between. I had not enough men to make an enclosing half moon, and an open one, besides, would tend to protect me against flanking movements which, as I had no defenses for my rear—though the government did not know this—could prove disastrous. My line was thrown along the edge of a *mata*.

I do not believe the government had less than two battalions on their line. My three hundred men were spread thin and I had them open a close and practically futile fire for show. The government line answered. No casualties. And they were probably as safe from us as we were from them. But I could not waste much ammunition in playing at modern war.

While the firing was proceeding, I was a little way behind the line, in a depression, teaching two young fellows how to operate the machine gun, with El Catire as an interested and conservative observer. We had one hundred and fifty belts of ammunition for the gun.

With the machine gun spitting death across the llano it would be comparatively easy to stop a charge; but the first attempt at a flanking movement on the part of our opponents could only be thwarted by flight.

Under cover of the machine gun racket, I withdrew one hundred and fifty men from the line, mounted with them and, emerging from the other side of the *mata*, made for the horizon, breaking the enemy's line of vision with *matas* and depressions of the land.

We galloped due north, and then northeast, till we reached the edge of the Apure jungle, about halfway between Palmarito and San Fernando. Then we proceeded at full speed along the edge of the jungle toward the state capital, where I expected to make a show of force and hoped to hear news of General Rodriguez's movements.

Scouts were sent on pretty far ahead to warn me of any patrol that might be roaming the region. In case one was sighted, and should its numbers warrant that attempt, we would attack it. Otherwise we would sink into the jungle, and God could help all concerned. It was,

however, very unlikely that a government troop would risk itself on the llanos at that time. The nearer we approached the mouth of the Apure, which flows into the Orinoco at San Fernando, the higher the water became. Where we hit the jungle it had already risen to almost a foot, and our troop was advancing in a blinding splash.

San Fernando de Apure is in the angle of the Orinoco and Apure rivers, protected by a promontory which rises from the plain and slopes toward the angle. It is a large, well built town, more like Caracas or Valencia than the other towns of the region. Masonry structures, built low and with sharp tile roofs, make up long streets slightly battered in outline. A typical llano plaza, large and shady, sleeps in the gaze of the peeling cathedral guarded by the squat government building of gray stone with green balustrades at the windows.

It is certainly a metropolis for tired fighters after a hectic, shadowy campaign in the savannas and the jungle. But its two regiments and its two gunboats would prevent our resting our living bones there, unless General Rodriguez's advance had caused the withdrawal of sufficient troops to warrant an attempt with my reunited forces. This I was determined to find out if at all possible before showing myself. At nightfall we camped in a *banco* off the edge of the jungle, the only piece of somewhat protected dry land we had come upon that day. Between our camp and the jungle the flooded plain trembled, lazily reflecting the reddening sky.

The problem now was how to get news from San Fernando.

The man who volunteered to swim the river into San Fernando with a bundle of dry clothes tied on his head brought back distressing news. General Rodriguez had not entered the country at all. Afterward I heard that he had met trouble with the authorities of Guiana. And there I was with less than three hundred men, divided at the moment into two troops, setting up a precarious bluff against two regiments, two gunboats, a miscarried plan and a whole sleeping republic. I emptied my pockets into the spy's shivering hands and gave the order to retreat.

We splashed our way as rapidly as we could over the llanos, now swelling with the tremendous tide of the Apure, leaving the jungle to one side and making straight for El Viento. Couriers were dispatched to warn El Catire at Uncein that the push was over and that he should make his way into Colombia as safely as he could. My men were in fine spirits. What they loved was fighting. Victory and defeat were to them deplorable contingencies that ended the fighting. As we muddled toward the frontier I thought of my little troop as a torch vainly trying to set fire to a forest of green wood. Later on the wood should be drier.

My courier came back with news of El Catire's debacle. I don't know to this day exactly how it happened, but I presume that the government men, realizing that he was in possession of only one machine gun, rushed his position in a fan-like movement corresponding to the sweep of the gun, creeping on the unprotected areas while the other parts of the field were being covered by its fire. My second troop had disappeared as if by magic. My couriers had found El Catire dead beside the broken machine gun, and a straggler they brought with them told me that the old *guerrillero* had refused to budge until he had shot the last belt. More than like a soldier at his post, El Catire had died as a priest at the feet of his deity.

At El Viento I crossed the frontier into Colombia, aching with fatigue and with just five dollars in my pocket, after having been in control for one month and a half of one of the wealthiest provinces of Venezuela.

I disbanded my force and took my way at a low trot toward the hospitality of Jerónimo Domingo, the sage of Tamé. Like a defeated soldier? Like another broken idol? More, I hope, like the humble acolyte of an unripe god.

NICE VEDDER

by FRANK J. SCHINDLER

A Slice of Life along the Chicago Loop

THE OLD reprobate was a chronic panhandler, shabby, ill kempt, with frayed whiskers that stuck out from his face like the hairs on the pan of an airedale. Like most of his ilk, he was devoid of shame or self-respect. His boozy eyes were out of focus and he had a plaintive whine in his voice; and he could recite a tale of woe that would draw tears from even the most stony faced and hard boiled harness bull.

He answered to the name of Plunkett, but that was not his real name for, after long years in this country, he still spoke with a German accent. There was the night McCall pinched him for vagrancy and there was a new desk sergeant on the job at the First Precinct station.

"What's your name?" the desk sergeant inquired.

"Blunkett," he answered.

"Your whole name?"

"Herman Blunkett."

"Uh-huh. B-l-u-n-k—"

"Naw," the panhandler interrupted. "Not B— P."

"Aw, Plunkett. Why the hell didn't you say Plunkett?"

"I did say Blunkett."

"What are you doing, kidding me?"

"Aw, don't razz the old rum," put in McCall. "He can't say Blunk— Aw, hell, he's got me talking that way. Listen, put him down as John Doe or any damn' thing. I don't know what his name is, but he used to be a doggoned good piano player in his day and the boys used to tell him to *plunk* the piano. That's why they call him Plunkett. I don't think the old soak knows his own name any more, do you, old-timer?"

"Bierbaum." Plunkett grinned, exposing four jagged teeth.

"Yeah, beer barrel," added McCall. "Jim, shove this old souse in the cooler. Thirty days will keep him off my beat for awhile. I'm tired of shagging him along."

Whether it rained, snowed, sleeted, or the sun was shining, he would brace a prospect with the same preface—

"Nice vedder today."

Having injected the nice vedder wedge, he would go on about ten starving children at home, a wife down with the chilblains, roup, or spinal "macginnis". That "wife" of his had some of the most peculiar ailments known to science. She would have been a corking good subject for the laboratory staff at the county hospital.

However, his eyes were usually bleary and sometimes he would pull that unethical trick of bracing the same prospect twice in one block. He was meandering along one day and stepped over to what looked like a prospect. It was detective McCall, staring into a store window; staring at a collection of cheap jewelry, pistols and a miscellaneous collection of junk. Blunkett edged up to him and helped him stare; and then hazarded—

"Nice vedder today."

McCall regarded him glumly, cocked one eye at the sky and growled—

"Yeah, if it don't rain."

"Yeah, nice vedder," Blunkett repeated. "Say, mister, you ain't got a couple o' dimes you can give an old guy for a cup of coffee? Ain't got no job and the wife is down with eczema, kids needs shoes, and I've been getting nothin' but tough breaks—"

McCall pulled back his coat and Blunkett got his eyes focused on his badge. He started to edge away, but McCall said:

"Come 'ere, bum. Look. See that German Luger in the window? That one, right there, yeah. Listen, or I'll sock you on the biscuit. Here's ten dollars. Go in and see if you can buy that off the uncle. Tell 'im to give you a clip of bullets with it, too. Bring it back to me with the change and you'll get a whole sawbuck, see?"

Blunkett's hand shook as he took the bill, and his eyes watered; but alas, he had to spend some of it for a gun, when a bucket of gin was more to his liking. He went into the store and McCall saw the merchant drag the gun out of the window. Shortly, Blunkett came out and passed the gun to McCall.

"Loaded?" asked McCall, examining the gun on his palm.

"Yeah, got bullets."

"Where's the change?"

"Here—four dollars."

"Where's the cash register receipt?"

"Here, see?"

"Uh-huh. Well, just because you didn't try to cheat me, here's two bucks. Yeah, that's yours. Take it away and keep off my beat."

The purchase of that gun unraveled a murder mystery that had been bothering the police department for six months. A robbery had been committed, and a man was shot dead, and the assailant had used a German Luger with notches cut into the butt. McCall could have gone into the store and got the gun on the strength of his authority, but he wanted information. His work wasn't crude. In the first place, the uncle had no license to sell a gun to a human derelict and, in the second place, he had no right to give him a clip of bullets with it. This was the uncle's unlucky day. Now, McCall had something on him, and he went into the store and proceeded to sweat what information he needed out

of the uncle, who knew who had pledged the gun.

"Toddy Dolese, hey?" McCall mused, after getting the name he wanted. "I've been kind of thinkin' all the while he had a hand in that job. Well, come on, you're pinched. Lock up."

He took his prisoner over to the station, booked him, and set the wheels into motion for rounding up one Toddy Dolese and one Dingbat Brewer, one whose heads there was a price of twenty-five hundred dollars. However, these low browed gents were keeping scarce until—

CAME a day when it rained and the temperature dropped and the whole town became a vast skating 'pond. Then the wind shifted, the temperature went up—but not enough to thaw the ice—and from early morning until late at night it alternately rained and snowed. A form of slush came down that made walking even more hazardous. It was a tough day.

Blunkett made his way south along State Street, mooching a dime here and a nickel there. He saw a stocky individual standing beside the curb, rocking on his toes, hands in his pockets, and whistling. He didn't know it was McCall, as his eyesight wasn't so good. Anyway, under the street light, McCall looked like a cheerful individual good for a touch.

"Nice vedder," volunteered Blunkett.

McCall stopped whistling and shifted his eyes without turning his head.

"Naw, it ain't," he disagreed. "It's damned tough weather. I suppose the wife's got the mange today, six of the kids got whoopin' cough and the other nine got St. Vitus dance. And the dog has malaria," he added, as an afterthought.

"Aw, hello, Tom." Blunkett grinned. "Excuse me. I'll step along."

"Wait!" commanded McCall. "What did you do with those two bucks I gave you one day?"

Blunkett dug into the lining of his shabby overcoat, under which the newspapers with which he was padded crackled, and brought out two dirty one dollar bills.

"I still got 'em," he answered.

"The hell you have! Savin' 'em for a rainy day, hey? Say, I don't know how old you are, but didn't you once play the piano in the Criterion Theater?"

Blunkett nodded his head.

"Uh-huh," McCall grunted. "You used to be a kind of a Beau Brummel in those days and I used to think you were a hell of a fine piano player. Woman make a bum out of you? Aw, never mind, you don't have to tell me. Anyway, you were a self-respecting guy. If I got you a job, you think you could lay off the panhandling?"

"Yeah, maybe," said Blunkett. "I think if I got a stake, I could start all over. You know, I was just a damn' fool, I guess. But there's a lot of life still left in the old bum."

"Uh-huh. Do you happen to know Toddy Dolese and Dingbat Brewer?"

"Sure. Those guys, sure. But I ain't no stool pigeon."

"Nobody said you was. Get this. I'm treatin' you like a human being, understand? Another dick would crack you on the skull and send you to the morgue so he wouldn't have to look at you. But, Oily Sam Flick is my stool pigeon, but I don't trust him—see? I have reason to believe those two bozos are hanging out in this neighborhood. If you see 'em, just tell me, that's all. Here's a dollar. Get something to eat and a drink. I'll be up and down the street here, on this side. We're closin' in on these birds and I'd like to make this pinch."

"Thanks, Tom," said Blunkett. "I'll try to help you. You're a regular guy."

He shambled away and McCall went to his whistling. He had a round, chubby face, wore a flat topped Stetson, and spoke in an absent minded manner, his eyes gazing off into space as if his mind were far away. However, the lieutenant used to say that when Tom McCall got absent minded, he was figuring reward money.

Blunkett, again, shambled over to the Ash Can saloon, where he got a bowl of

stew and a glass of beer. Then he sat down to the piano and extracted music of a sort out of it with his rheumatic fingers. This earned him another bowl of stew, a few beers and forty cents in silver. As he sat playing the piano, a bizarre figure in his shabby overcoat and unkempt whiskers, he saw Dolese and Brewer come in. They stepped to the bar and had a drink and conversed in guarded tones. He walked away from the piano and edged in alongside of them at the bar.

"Nice vedder," he hazarded.

"Who the hell cares, bum?" snarled Dolese, a bozo whose hair grew almost into his eyes; and he had a long chin like an ape.

"Excuse me," Blunkett apologized. "I thought you'd buy the musician a beer."

"Aw, buy your own beer, you lousy panhandler," Dolese snapped, and went back to his conversation with Brewer.

Blunkett bought a big beer and sipped it slowly. He wanted to hear what they were talking about. However, Oily Sam Flick came in; Sam, the stool pigeon whom McCall didn't trust, and who was playing the game both ways. He paid no attention to Blunkett, who was only another bum to him, and said:

"Say, jees, the neighborhood is lousy with dicks. Saw McCall. He'll be shovin' his nose in here soon. You guys go out in the yard. If he comes in here, I'll steer him out there. You jump him. I got a cab. I'll roll around the alley and we'll shanghai 'im down the Valley, bump 'im off an' dump 'im in the Drainage Canal."

Blunkett shambled away from the bar, plunked the piano a few notes, debated on which way to exit, and went out the back door, unnoticed. Just another bum.

The rear exit was closed in with a wooden box-like structure, which led to a short yard. This yard was littered with garbage cans, and one was full of booze bottles. Blunkett moved a big can over to the door, extracted two square faced gin bottles out of it, set one up on the cover of the can and grasped the other in his right hand. He crouched down behind the can, and the sloppy snow and rain ran down his collar and made him shiver. His teeth clicked, and he growled, "Nice vedder," and added a profane noun.

In the saloon, Oily Sam stood near the front door, making a pretense of reading a racing chart, when, in fact, he was watching for McCall. He hove into view shortly and regarded the saloon in his absent minded way. Sam removed his hat, stretched his arms over his head, as if stretching himself, and placed the hat back on his head. Dolese and Brewer went out the back door.

They ranged themselves alongside the door, and Blunkett clamped his few teeth on his tongue, lest they hear them chatter. The fact was, he did not have enough teeth to chatter, but he imagined it.

"No shootin' here," said Dolese. "The place is lousy with bulls. We'll just stick this guy up and cart 'im away."

Five minutes elapsed and the cold was searching down into Blunkett's marrow, and he silently cursed the two murderers. It was too late to get away then and, besides, he wasn't going to see the only dick who had ever given him a kind word come to harm.

THEN McCall came through the door, with Oily Sam ahead of him. He was suspecting an ambush, but these two cutthroats were adepts at the ambushing game. Oily Sam pounced on his gun hand and the other two jammed guns into his ribs and they had him dead to rights.

"Pretty stick up, hey?" McCall remarked nonchalantly. "Boys are clever, no foolin'. Well, God help you, Sam! You better travel a long, long way from Chi, bozo."

"Yeah, you'll travel a long, long way." Sam giggled. "Stick—I'll be back with the bus."

He disappeared through the door.

"A little ride, hey?" inquired McCall.

"Yeah, dick, you ain't comin' back, either," answered Dolese. "You might get to Lemont or Joliet, if the current is strong enough."

"Oh, I'm goin' swimmin'," observed McCall. "Well, I got a partner across the alley. You guys won't get far."

"Eh? Boloney!" snarled Brewer. "You can't scare us guys with that hooey."

At the moment a sort of airedale-ish apparition rose up from behind the big garbage can and an arm swung a square bottle down on Brewer's skull. As the bottle shattered and Brewer started to sag, the hand on the end of the arm reached for the bottle on the can cover. Up went the arm and down came the bottle across the bridge of Dolese's nose. He had dodged, but one second too late. It was a terrible blow. He sobbed like a baby and clutched his face for a short second, for McCall whipped a fist against his chin and he sprawled over his companion in crime.

"Nice vedder," remarked Blunkett.

"Yeah, damn' nice weather for a murder, old-timer," answered McCall. "Thanks, old man, I won't forget this."

"That's all right, Tom, you're a regular guy."

"Here comes that cab," said Tom. "Wait'll I nail Sam."

He jumped for the alley gate and welcomed Sam with a gun in his hand. Sam was the most terror stricken stool pigeon in the world the next moment. McCall yanked him out of the cab, handcuffed his wrist to his ankle and left him lying in the slush of the alley, as he went for the other two.

"Give me a hand on these rats," he said to Blunkett.

They carried the two into the cab, shackled them together, and dumped Sam in on top of them.

"Where do you flop?" McCall asked Blunkett, who told him where he slept. "All right," added McCall, "I'll see you in a few days. Need a couple of dollars? Here you are. It's all right, old boy. Take it away."

The next morning all the papers had a big spread:

"Detective McCall captures three desperadoes single handed. Captives confess, clearing six month old murder mystery."

A week later, the *Herald-Express* printed—

"Detective McCall receives the *Herald-Express'* monthly reward of one hundred dollars for valiant police work."

Then McCall went searching for Blunkett. He wasn't at the flop, so McCall tried State Street. Sure enough, the old bum braced him with his usual "Nice vedder," and started telling about the wife and her jaundice.

McCall checked him and regarded him with amused tolerance.

"Sometimes your eyes are bad," he mused. "A pair of cheaters might help you. Come on with me."

He steered Blunkett into a barber shop.

"Give this bum the whole works," he told the barber.

So Blunkett got a haircut, a shave, a shampoo and a face massage. McCall paid for it.

"You look like a human being now," said McCall. "Now, get a bath."

Blunkett got a bath and then McCall steered him into a gents' furnishing store, where he outfitted him from the skin out, including two pairs of shoes and two suits.

"Come on over to the bank," said McCall. "I'm crazy to do this; you'll only spend this dough for hooch. Still, you said a stake would give you a fresh start. You saved me from taking a ride. I got all the credit for pinching those two yeggs, and a chunk of reward money. Well, I'm splitting it with you."

They went to a bank and McCall opened an account with one thousand dollars in it.

"There's the book," he said. "Now, get into those clean clothes, get a decent flop, and then go out and nail yourself a job running an elevator or something. Got me?"

The old bum seemed to be on the verge of tears.

"I'll try—damn' hard," he answered, and held out his hand.

"That's all any of us can do, old man—try." McCall shook his hand. "Good luck! And don't let me see you mooching dimes along the pike. So long."

Well, McCall didn't see the old reprobate for six months. He was standing on the walk on State Street, up near Harrison, when what looked like a prosperous business man, with horn rimmed spectacles and false teeth, stepped to him and remarked—

"Nice vedder."

McCall regarded him with astonishment, then grinned and held out his hand, saying:

"Yes, it is. Damned fine weather. How's the wife, Blunkett?"

"Fine, Tom," replied Blunkett.

"That's strange. She was always sickly. And how are the kids?"

"Aw, can that, Tom." Blunkett grinned. "No, I'm not mooching dimes any more. I've got a new lease on life. I don't drink. There's a lot of life still left in the old bum. Woman made a bum out of me, married the other guy and he would have made a bum out of her; but he died too soon and left her a wad of insurance. Well, I'm married to her now. Got a radio store up south."

"Good boy!" exclaimed McCall. "I'll bring you a little business. I'll be in the market for a radio."

"Well, here's my card. Come in and I'll fix you up. And it won't cost you a nickel. By the way, I see by the papers that the cops are looking for Squidge Donathon and his bandits. I saw 'em cruisin' around the Loop in a big black can; Indiana license 139840."

"You sure?" asked McCall, looking interested.

"Positive, absolutely. I know those crooks."

"Thanks, that's a hot tip. More work for the undertaker."

They exchanged a few more remarks, and then Blunkett shook hands and walked down the street.

At the curb stood a squad car, in which lolled three plainclothesmen. McCall stood on the sidewalk, idly watching the traffic in the street. His eyes followed cars and read license numbers. Then a big black limousine came slowly cruising along with the traffic. McCall didn't catch the front plate but, as it went by, the Indiana license tag with 139840 hit his eyes.

He jumped for the squad car.

"Get that can with the Indiana tag!" he snapped at the chauffeur. "Squidge Donathon!"

He hit the front seat in the next motion and the car pulled away from the curb. However, Squidge was not sleeping. The big limousine speeded up and tried to snake quickly through the traffic. A siren yowled, a volley of shots crashed out, which was answered by another volley, a shatter of glass, a grinding crash as the big limousine sideswiped a street car, swept around in a circle, up over the curb and crashed against a thick light post. Bandits and cops mixed with fist and guns. One bandit was knocked sprawling and his gun slid along the sidewalk to the feet of Blunkett, who was meandering along the sidewalk. Five hard boiled guys were down and out, but the sixth and last was backing up sidewise and drawing a careful bead on McCall. Blunkett went down on one knee, picked up the gun, sighted carefully through his cheaters and pulled the trigger. Two shots rang out as one, but Blunkett had fired first. The bullet from the bandit's gun seared McCall's face, while the bandit fell on his face.

"Who fired that shot?" asked McCall, wiping the blood from his face.

"The old guy, here," spoke up a detective.

McCall turned and looked into Blunkett's face.

"Nice vedder," said Blunkett, handing McCall the gun, "for shootin' skunks. I told you, Tom, there was still a lot of life left in the old bum yet."

"I'll tell the cockeyed world!" McCall grinned. "Listen, you old son of a gun," he added, "I used to shag you off my beat, but from now on you can do any damn thing you want along this pike. Old man, I'll be over to see you. Yeah, gotta get these skunks in the cooler. Well, so long. Nice vedder."

"So long, Tom. Nice vedder."

NAPOLEON *the* LITTLE

CHAPTER I

THE LIEUTENANT TAKES A RIDE

PINKY HASSFURTHER was on kitchen police again. This type of enforced activity was not at all unusual with the carrot haired Pinky.

"Ef the spuds I peeled in this here man's Army was to be put end to end, they'd extend a coupla billion miles out into space," asserted Pinky. "Yes, sir, they'd circle the sun and come back and loop the loop around the Milky Way."

Certainly the deft manner in which Pinky divested a potato of its outer wrapping and the speed with which he demonstrated its inner and spiritual grace argued much practise.

"How come you-all done got yo'self on kitchen police again so soon?" asked Nails, the long and lanky and soft of speech. His nickname—Coffin—was self-inflicted. "Mah name's Nails, they calls me Coffin Nails wheah Ah comes from," he had stated mildly on his arrival in the troop, and the name had stuck.

"How come I got on kitchen police again so soon?" Pinky straightened up from his task. "Boy, it's gettin' so when I leave this here job I meet myself comin' back. I jest gets through four days' detail removin' warts from spuds for overstayin' pass when I bumps into Little Napoleon. Little Napoleon struts his stuff, shoves out his little chest and says, 'You don't wanta do this kinda thing again, my man,' he says. 'Don't forget, my man,' he says, 'that every private soldier carries a field marshal's baton in his knapsack,' he says. I salutes. 'Yes, sir, lieutenant,' says I, 'but they ain't been carryin' knapsacks since the Spanish War,' I says, not meanin' any harm. Oh, boy, I shouldn't oughta said that."

"Did he get soah?" asked Coffin Nails.

"Did he get sore? I'll tell the cock-eyed world he got sore! He clouds up and rains all over me, then he ups and socks me six days of kitchen police and confined to camp, and me all dated up for Friday night with a cute little señorita down to Escobar's ranch. I ain't wishin' Little Napoleon any hard luck—" Pinky

A Novelette of the Mexican Border

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

slashed viciously at a potato—"I'm just hopin' he'll stub his toe and break his neck and bust his fat head wide open on a sharp rock."

Coffin Nails very deliberately rolled and lighted a cigaret, then stared quietly off over the mesa, its hot, white, alkali surface quivering under the impact of the sun's rays.

"Yo' shuah you got yo'self dated up with that señorita?" he asked mildly, without looking at Pinky.

"Well, not 'zactly dated up," admitted the carrot haired one. "I asks her may I come and see her Friday afternoon and she don't say nothin'."

"Uh," grunted Coffin Nails, and relapsed into noncommittal silence, a silence only interrupted by the ceaseless splashing thump as Hassfurther threw one peeled potato after another into a galvanized can half full of water.

Stable call blew. Coffin Nails rose from where he had been squatting, rose all at once, springy and resilient as finely tempered steel, nodded to Hassfurther,

his gray eyes serene and untroubled, and went toward the picket line.

Pinky gazed speculatively after the lean form of the departing Coffin Nails, studied the breadth of shoulder and the trimness of hip, the quietly efficient lines of this soft voiced Southerner, and shook his head.

"I sure hope he ain't aimin' to grab off that señorita himself," he thought. "This baby don't wanta get in any mixup with Coffin Nails at all, at all."

A sharp voice hailed Coffin Nails as he passed by the orderly tent.

"Nails!" it called.

"Yes, suh." The lean soldier came to attention and saluted.

A short, heavily built officer came forth from the tent, a telegram in his hands. The officer was inclined to stoutness and pudginess, even to the extent of developing a roll of fat around his neck. This premature weight, combined with a large pair of horn rimmed spectacles from which hung a broad, black silk ribbon, gave him the air of being much older than he actually was. On the collar of his shirt he wore the silver bar of a first lieutenant.

First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, Nth Cavalry, as his name appeared on the "Army Register", looked not unlike his namesake, the Little Corporal, a fact which was no little source of gratification to the first lieutenant. Convinced as he was that the resemblance was more than merely physical, he felt that he was worthy of greater things than this command of some forty-odd men of Troop K, Nth Cavalry, a troop irreverently dubbed the "Forty Thieves" by the remainder of the regiment.

"Nails—" Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody always issued the most simple order with all the solemnity with which the Emperor himself might have ordered the Old Guard into action—"Nails, find Sergeant Mueller immediately and direct him to report to me on an affair of very serious importance, very serious."

Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody removed his horn rimmed glasses and swung them by their silken cord, gazing meanwhile at Coffin Nails with a magisterial air.

"Yes, suh," agreed Coffin Nails and, saluting, turned away.

"Nails!" He halted and turned about again, to find the eye of the officer fixed upon him disapprovingly. "Always remember to complete your salute before executing the about face."

"Yes, suh," agreed Nails amiably and departed, this time saluting with both hands, right and left, in turn.

FIRST SERGEANT MUELLER, a hot and angry eyed Teuton, came to the orderly tent.

"There is a matter here of the very gravest importance," greeted Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, tapping his protruding stomach with the telegram. "A matter of the very gravest importance," he repeated, standing with legs slightly apart, his right hand within his shirt, a thoughtful frown on his brow, striking that classic pose in which the great Bonaparte is often pictured.

"Yes, sir," returned Mueller, standing stiffly at the strained position of attention that only a German can achieve to perfection. "First Sergeant Mueller reports to the Lootenand."

"Sergeant Mueller, I have here—" the lieutenant again punctuated his remarks by tapping his stomach with the folded telegram—"I have here an order requiring this troop immediately to capture the bandit José de la Cruz Luque, who is reported in our neighborhood."

"Yes, sir," returned Mueller, and stared woodenly to the front, waiting.

"This will not be easy." The officer cocked his head, bird-like. "I repeat that this will not be easy. It will require organization, careful planning and intense concentration on the problem in hand. I expect—" the lieutenant cleared his throat and thrust his hand still farther into his shirt—"I expect every man in the troop to support me with all his enthusiasm."

"Yes, sir," agreed Sergeant Mueller, looking a little blank; then, deferentially, "Ven does the troop move out, sir?" he asked.

"That," replied Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, "I will inform you tomorrow, Sergeant Mueller."

He waved his hand loftily and, turning, strode to his tent, his head bent on his chest, his hands behind his back, looking indeed like a man upon whom vast problems rested heavily—or, to a hasty observer, like a man suffering from a slight touch of lumbago.

"*Herr Gott!*" breathed Mueller under his breath as he returned to the picket line.

"*POR LOS dientes de los Padres Santes!*" swore José de la Cruz Luque. "I will wring his neck like a chicken; I will break every bone in his body, I will—"

"You will do nothing, señor, nothing. That he comes here and talks with my father in the evening should not make a strong man like you jealous. He is nothing to me."

Rosita tossed her head proudly, half turning away, her hands on her hips, her eyes cast provocatively backward on this huge, stoop shouldered Mexican in his gay colored *serape* and his great, silver embroidered sombrero.

"It is true that he is nothing to you?" he asked with narrowed eyes.

"True, my great ox—are you so small souled that you should grow jealous of every gringo who speaks to my father?"

The Mexican subsided, nodding his head in agreement. Then he looked up quickly.

"When does he come again?"

Rosita was humming to herself and only half heard the question. She replied without thinking.

"*Quien sabe?*" She shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps tonight. *Quien sabe?*" Then, sensing that she had erred, she turned in time to catch the sullen glare in the man's eyes.

"I did but tease you," she said quickly. "He comes not tonight. No, no, my great ox, he comes not tonight. You will believe me?" She looked searchingly into his eyes.

"Yes, I will believe you." But his tone carried little conviction.

The two stood, she within and he without the great iron grilled gate that led into her father's *hacienda*, talking through the bars. Behind him, his horse, caparisoned with a marvelously carved and silver mounted Mexican saddle, stood fidgeting, its reins dropped on the ground. It was late afternoon and already the mesa that surrounded the *hacienda* was losing the harsh sharpness of its outlines. The soft gold and lavender haze of twilight was beginning to smooth out the crudities of the desert.

"You must go now, señor," she said. "I can not remain here longer."

"No, you are expecting the gringo dog," he flared, his overhanging eyebrows drawn down angrily.

"No, no, and again no!" She stamped her foot.

Luque laughed unpleasantly and turned to his horse.

"I can promise you," he said as he vaulted into the saddle, "that he will not call upon you tonight." And with a mocking laugh and a swing of his sombrero he reared his horse and set off at a gallop toward the direction of the American camp.

"*Madre de Dios!*" whispered the girl fearfully. "*Madre de Dios!* Luque will kill him!"

The muffled beat of the hoofs of Luque's horse grew fainter until at last it died out in the distance.

The girl stood there, her lips parted, listening.

FIRST Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody found that his retirement to his tent was not so much typical of his namesake, the Little Corporal, as it was of Achilles of more ancient vintage. He came to the conclusion after awhile that he had mixed his history, and remem-

bered that L'Empereur did most of his heavy thinking while strolling through the bivouacs of his men, a silent and inscrutable figure, wrapped in his long cavalry cloak, disappearing into the shadows and faintly seen by lucky watchers at rare intervals in the flickering rays of the camp-fires.

This mode of action proved upon examination to be a little complicated by the fact that these American soldiers had no camp-fires unless the kitchen fire could be so dignified by that name.

There would undoubtedly be a crap game in full progress around the kitchen fire. And even Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody shuddered a little at the evident lack of welcome his presence would elicit as a disturber of a crap game.

He sighed a little at the complexity of the matter before him, then breathed more easily. Why, of course, he could stroll upon the mesa, buried in his thoughts. His only remaining regret was that he had no long cavalry cloak.

The contestants in the crap game saw him disappear into the shadows and speculated variously, after the free and easy fashion of soldiers, upon what might be his motives.

All unwitting of the perils that might lurk on the trail ahead, First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody moved majestically forward into the night, unfortunately taking the road that led to the Hacienda Escobar.

Now José de la Cruz Luque, being a rude and unlettered *pelayo*, had in all probability never even heard of Napoleon the Great. Even had he heard of him, it is a matter of great doubt whether he would have seen the likeness between the overmastering personality of Napoleon and this pudgy imitation of him, trudging along the road toward the Hacienda Escobar.

José de la Cruz Luque stood in the shadow of a great yucca on the edge of the road, a blunt and businesslike carbine across his arm, prepared to knock the spots out of any and all gringos who traveled in the direction of the walls which sheltered the girl of his dreams.

Coming toward him, his mind filled with the problem of capturing this same José de la Cruz Luque, trudged First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, still regretting that regulations prescribing the uniforms worn by the American Army said nothing of long cloaks.

As for the bandit he was ordered to capture at any cost, the lieutenant wondered whether all was true that was reported of this Mexican, a bloodthirsty and rapacious desperado of the worst type which the Border produces. His latest crimes had been the attacking of a lonely American ranch-house, the massacre of the entire family and the driving away of the cattle. The week before he had killed an American soldier near Pilares. A week before that he had captured a section of an Army pack train, killing three packers and looting the train. He was reputed to be fearless and possessed of a cold blooded and murderous ferocity more animal-like than human.

Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody shook his head as he thought on these things. At least he started to shake his head. The shake stopped in the middle.

The sharp crack and flare of a rifle close at hand froze him in his tracks. Something pushed his hat down over his eyes, and he stumbled and fell prone in the road, certain that he had been killed. Then he heard a footstep close beside him in the road. Something hard prodded him.

"*Por Dios!*" swore a rough voice in Mexican. "This is a fat and foolish looking pig I have killed."

First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody realized that he had better sham death than risk another bullet. Again the foot prodded him.

"Gringo pig, you were not worth a bullet," soliloquized the Mexican. "Had I known you were so old and fat I would have let you live. Certainly Rosita can see nothing to admire in your filthy carcass." Again Luque prodded the prone officer with his foot.

"What the hell do you think yo'ah

doin'? Hands up!" the lieutenant in the dust heard a drawling voice say in English.

The Mexican moved suddenly. Then there was silence.

WHAT had happened? Brody dare not stir. There was no sound to tell him whether his foe was triumphant or not. For what seemed an eternity he waited for the next sound to give him the information.

"Aw, keep them hands up!" The same vaguely familiar voice broke the silence again. "Wait till Ah see whethah you done killed this heah man befo' Ah see whethah to kill you or let you live."

A great surge of gladness welled up into the heart of First Lieutenant Brody. He wasted no time getting to his feet.

There was a horrible scream from beside him.

"*Madre de Dios!*" yelled the wild eyed Mexican, his eyes sticking out in horror. "He has returned to life."

The frightened and superstitious Luque turned tail and fled blindly, as if all the devils in hell were on his trail.

"That guy ain't afeard o' nothin' livin'," said Coffin Nails, looking in the direction in which the Mexican had fled, "but he shuah is sca'ed powahful bad of anything he thinks oughta be daid."

"Ah—ah," First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody cleared his throat. "Very good you came along. I was trying to get him close enough so that I could grab his gun and overpower him—a-hem—but the matter ended very well, although he nearly got me at that." He examined a hole drilled neatly through his campaign hat crown about a quarter of an inch above where the top of his head would normally rest.

"Yeah, he's shuah a powerful bad customer, that there Luque. You hadn't ought to be walkin' out alone without no gun, Lieutenant." Coffin Nails' voice was faintly reproachful.

"What did you say his name was?" The officer suddenly stopped feeling himself in search of possible injuries.

"Why, that theah's Luque, José de la Cruz Luque, kinda tough bandit."

"That was Luque? Why didn't you capture him? He's the man we have to get!" The Lieutenant's voice was almost hysterical.

"Pshaw, is that so?" Coffin Nails' voice was mildly regretful. "Ah shuah wish Ah'd known that befo'. Now ain't that too bad." He shook his head. Then he brightened up. "Tell you what Ah'll do, Lieutenant; Ah'll mosey along and git him fo' you anyways."

"Ridiculous, impossible, no!"

Brody was peevish and irritable, not only at the blow to his *amour propre* but at the escape of the bandit. Both happenings had upset him badly. Without further word he turned on his heel and trudged back toward camp.

Coffin Nails watched him for a moment, scratching his head in puzzlement.

"Pshaw," he said to himself, "ef that ain't too bad."

Then going back into the mesquite and yucca, he found his horse and vaulted into the saddle, setting the animal's head toward the Hacienda Escobar.

CHAPTER II

THE CAMP OF THE ENEMY

SINGING the "Song Of The Cockroach", that famous marching air of the Villista armies, Coffin Nails swayed easily to the motion of his horse, grateful for the cool wind of evening which caressed his face, grateful for the silence and the beauty of the desert, a silence and a beauty which enveloped him like a cloak.

"La Cucaracha, la Cucaracha,
Ya no puede caminar,
Porque no puede, porque no tiene
Marihuana que fumar,"

he sang, beating time to the trot of his horse, his eyes on the little spot of shadow far ahead on the trail, which marked the buildings of the Hacienda Escobar.

Suddenly he stopped his singing. It had occurred to him that the buildings

of the Hacienda Escobar were unusually dark tonight.

Nearer and nearer he drew, the steady beat of his horse's hoofs muffled by the heavy white alkali dust, his eyes peering into the shadows ahead.

He approached within some four or five hundred yards of the ranch-house, then suddenly he reined his horse to a halt and stared ahead. Both horse and man were frozen into a statue of attention, the horse, his ears pointed forward, sniffing the breeze nervously, the man, chin and head held high, watching with every sense alert.

The ranch-house seemed to be surrounded with innumerable fireflies, glowing red in the shadows and paler in the moonlight, shifting and blinking out only to reappear.

All around the house they were, before and behind and extending out into the mesa. As Coffin Nails watched, the fireflies slowly began to concentrate into a compact mass, the compact mass of glowing lights elongated and formed themselves into a column which began to move toward him slowly and irresistibly, swaying and undulating along the line of the road.

His horse was gathered and collected, all taut beneath him. It took but a fraction of a second to whirl his mount on its haunches. He felt the good horse crouch for a second beneath him and then leap forward. He swayed slightly to the first impulse, then settled down into the saddle as he was borne swiftly into the night, back toward where the lights of the camp twinkled against the hillside.

The words of the "Song Of The Cockroach" still rang in his head and he adjusted their tempo to the beat of the galloping hoofs beneath him. He hummed as he bent his head to the breeze, exulting in the long, free stride of his horse, watching the chaparral and the mesquite flow past him, watching the outlines of the hills above him change and shift as his steed carried him swiftly through the night.

But the long column of fireflies behind him had sensed the meaning of this flying shadow in the night, and he heard shouts and yells and, leaning back in the saddle, saw the long, undulating column of pinpoints of light suddenly disturbed and agitated, saw the pinpoints of light accelerate their up and down motion. He knew that he was being pursued at the gallop.

Leaning low over his horse's mane, he pressed the mount to greater effort and felt it respond courageously.

Nearer and nearer drew the twinkling lights of the camp so that now he could see the dim outlines of the tents and, black against the farther side, the long picket line.

It was time to give the alarm. Drawing his pistol from its holster, the lone horseman turned in the saddle and fired two shots to the rear. The bark and flash of his weapon was answered by shouts and some scattering shots from the dark bulk of the advancing horsemen behind him. Turning, he gazed on the rapidly nearing camp ahead of him.

Men were running out of the tents and looking stupidly at the excitement in the mesa before them. Again Nails fired, this time rapidly, using the last three cartridges in his magazine.

He was now almost to the camp. Dropping his reins, he cupped his hands.

"The greasahs!" he shouted as he swept into the line of tents.

Before him stood First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody. Pulling his horse to its haunches, Nails came to a sliding stop in front of the officer, who stood there idly swinging his horn rimmed pince-nez by its silken ribbon.

"Suh, the greasahs are comin' right on mah tail, and comin' fast!" said Coffin Nails, in what for him was an excited tone.

First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody looked at the private soldier above him severely.

"Don't you know, Nails, that you must dismount from your horse before addressing a dismounted superior—"

There rose a shout from some of the men and a wild running about.

"Almighty," breathed Coffin Nails, and turned his horse.

Standing gaping at him was Turner, the trumpeter, his short cavalry trumpet hanging over his shoulder by a woven yellow cord.

"Tuhner," shouted Nails, "blow call to ahms and blow it quick.

The first few notes were rather ragged and scattering, but gradually the full power of the nerve tingling call expanded in its warning, repeated its blare of alarm, so that men grabbed their rifles and belts and rushed to the edge of camp, where Nails pointed toward the danger zone. They flung themselves down and began to pump bullets into the dark mass of horsemen approaching at full gallop. One or two rifles started, then more and more added themselves to the chorus until there was a long line of them spitting death into the darkness.

THE FIRST few seconds the shooting was wild, but Nails leaped from his horse and walked along the line.

""Tain't no good shootin' at the moon," he warned several men, bending down where they lay, firing and reloading. Came then First Sergeant Mueller.

"Baddle sighd undt take id easy!" he shouted, and steadied them down still more so that the firing lost its wild and ragged character and began to deal destruction to that black mass of horsemen so close upon them.

The enemy slowed down and paused.

"Rapid fire!" called Sergeant Mueller, and the intensity of the firing gathered speed until it was almost impossible to hear individual shots, so merged were they into one long continuous roll.

The Mexican mob began to disintegrate, and suddenly its flying remnants disappeared into the shadows of the mesa whence they had come.

"Cease firing!" shouted Sergeant Mueller. He blew a long strong blast on his whistle and ended the smash and roar and brought silence to the long line of prone men.

Out on the mesa they could see several black blotches, sinister looking shadows that lay still and silent.

The silence continued for a moment as the men stirred and peered forward into the moonlight. It was finally broken by the full and sonorous voice of First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody.

"Well done, my gallant man," he boomed majestically. "You have covered yourself with glory and put the enemy to rout. Soldiers of America, your Nation can be proud of you for this night's work—and—and—" the lieutenant tried to think up some of the classic gems of approval with which Napoleon Bonaparte's speeches to his soldiers were so filled, but could remember nothing except "Soldiers of France! Twenty centuries look down upon you from these pyramids", and this, somehow, did not seem appropriate.

There was a hysterical sort of cackle from the end of the line of men in front of him, a cackle reminiscent of the vainglorious boastings of a hen recently delivered of an egg, but it was changed into a cough and the lieutenant's frown of annoyance cleared up. He hemmed once or twice and prepared to finish his speech when the mild drawl of Coffin Nails interrupted:

"Lootenant, hadn't we bettah pile on ouah hosses and go aftah them greasahs? They'll be makin' fo' the rivah and we can catch 'em at the fo'd."

"Yes, Lootenand, dot is so," boomed Sergeant Mueller's bass. "Dot iss Luque's gang o' bandits and maybe we can cadch dem. Yes?" And he waited hopefully for his officer's word, his whistle ready at his lips to give the warning blast that should fling these waiting men toward the picket line and their horses.

First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody looked at him magisterially.

"One should never—" he said with deliberation, swinging his pince-nez the while—"one should never move hastily to the offensive without due consideration

of all the elements that enter into it. Crafty as the fox in planning and courageous as the lion in execution—that is my principle, Sergeant Mueller."

He turned on his heel, his hands behind his back, and began to pace backward and forward after the manner of Napoleon Bonaparte in that famous picture "Before Austerlitz".

"*Himmelkruezgranaten donnerwetter!*" swore First Sergeant Mueller.

"Gawd!" breathed Coffin Nails, staring at the top kick in astonishment. "What was that theah mouthful you just done got off!"

But Sergeant Mueller's Teutonic soul was stirred to its depths; he grunted another string of German expletives, which sounded like huge barrels of sauerkraut rolled along a hollow floor, and raised his whistle to his lips.

"Pigk oop the empties!" he called. "Loadt undt lock your bieces undt standt by fur ordors!"

To the cheerful clink of empty brass cartridge cases being gathered in, he walked to the far end of the line of men, staring out over the mesa and rumbling to himself like the empty caissons of a whole battery bumping over a cobblestone street.

"I'll say that squarehead can tell 'em a few things if you jest let him cut loose in his own language!" said Pinky Hassfurther from nearby, admiration in his voice.

"Ain't it the truth!" agreed a companion, gazing after the first sergeant's blocky form with a new respect in his eyes.

FIRST Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody continued to stride back and forth, his hands behind his back; the men alternately stared at him curiously and peered with longing out into the mesa.

Finally the officer came to a halt. He called Sergeant Mueller.

"Sergeant," he said very authoritatively, "I have considered the general and special situation, our objective and the means in hand to accomplish it—"

"Yes, sir?" Sergeant Mueller batted his eyes, not knowing what it was all about but suspecting the worst.

"Yes, I have formulated my decision. This decision is to make no move without full and complete knowledge of the enemy. The great masters of the art of war, Sergeant Mueller, and I might say the greatest master of the art of war, never moved without complete information of the enemy at his fingertips. It was to this that he owed his overwhelming success."

"Does the Lootenand mean we don't chase dem greasers donighd?" asked the literal minded sergeant.

"I mean just that. You can dismiss the men, Sergeant Mueller, and I will go to my tent and make a report of this night's work. And rest assured, Sergeant Mueller, that your name will not be forgotten when I enlarge upon the praiseworthy efforts of the courageous soldiers of this magnificent troop!" With which parting announcement, Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody stalked to his tent.

"Undt dot," growled Sergeant Mueller to himself, "iss the segond dime we haff let dot *verfluchter* greaser gedt away. For vhy does dot lootenand beat apout the bush? A fine bunch of bush beaters he iss makin' of diss troob of cavalry, *ja wohl!*"

"Coffin Nails," shouted some one, "there's a greaser lady wants to *habla* with you down to the picket line."

The announcement was greeted with shouts and much advice to Coffin Nails as he stalked down to see what it was all about.

CHAPTER III

NAILS MAKES A SUGGESTION

THE REPORT of the presence of a greaser lady was slightly exaggerated, as it was no more than a slim *mozo*, barefooted and clad in white cotton shirt and trousers and great straw sombrero who awaited Coffin Nails, and gave him a note hastily scrawled on wrapping paper:

Dear Señor Neels:

You must come to the Hacienda. Hurry. I am in danger. For the love of God come!

The hasty scrawl was unsigned, but Coffin Nails was certain that he knew from whom it had come. Giving the *mozo* a quarter and a cigaret, he told him to tell his mistress not to worry and to thank her for the warning. Then he retraced his steps toward his tent, thinking deeply.

Undoubtedly Luque hung about the Hacienda Escobar. And the Hacienda Escobar was the place to capture Luque.

"Ah'm perishin' with ambitions to talk to the Old Man," Coffin Nails informed Sergeant Mueller. "Is that O.K. with you?"

"For vhy do you vand to talk to the lootenand?" asked Mueller.

"Ah'm figgerin' Ah can take him to a place wheah he cain't help but grab in old Luque."

"H'm," sniffed Mueller, "it will be noddings but more bush beating; yah, go on undt talk mit him. It von't make no difference nohow."

"Fuhst sahgent's permission to speak to the Lootenant," reported Coffin Nails, saluting the fat little officer.

"Yes, yes, Nails, what is it?"

"Ah think Ah knows wheah this heah Luque hangs out, suh, when he ain't busy committin' crimes."

"What?" First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody evinced no little excitement.

"Yes, suh, Ah thinks Ah kin find him pretty *pronto*, right down heah to the Hacienda Escobar. Yes, suh, ain't no mannah o' doubt but what he's theah most of the time."

"So!" The officer took this under advisement and paced back and forth in front of his tent, head bent low on his chest, hands behind his back.

"We all could trail right down theah tonight and grab him in, Lootenant," suggested Coffin Nails hopefully.

"No, no indeed." Napoleon Bonaparte Brody was firm and certain upon this point. "We will allow the matter to rest for the present. Rest assured that I shall strike very swiftly and very certainly once the strategy of the case is satisfactorily outlined in my own mind. In war one should be as cunning as a fox in planning and as swift as an eagle in striking. Remember that, Nails. It may stand you in good stead some day in time of crisis. That is all, Nails. You are dismissed."

Coffin Nails saluted and strolled back toward his own tent. The candlelight within showed the shadows of several heads on the canvas walls.

"Happy is the dealer in a big jack pot," intoned a voice from within.

"And I comes right back at you with another raise, two blue berries. Whadda you know about that, soldier?" said another voice.

"And here's your two blue berries and I boosts her another peg jest to show you I ain't scared o' no four card flush."

"And the gambler's wife wept—" intoned the first voice. "Happy is the dealer in a big jack pot."

Coffin Nails walked away, down toward the picket line where his horse was still standing, its saddle on. Tightening cinch and adjusting headstall and curb chain, he mounted and rode slowly down to the end of the row of horses.

"Where the hell you goin' with that oat hound?" called a voice from the shadows, the picket line guard.

"Sh-sh," warned Coffin Nails. "Me? Ah done got me a little date down here a ways. Ah'll be moseyin' back in a hour or so."

"All right, give her a kiss for me," said the picket line guard indifferently, and Coffin Nails picked his way down to the road that led to the Hacienda Escobar.

As his horse moved out, a little unwillingly at the prospect of leaving all its companions on the long horse line, Coffin Nails swore softly.

"How come yo' gettin' to be such a daid beat, Pluto? Ah sweah Ah nevah seen such a animile as you fo' wantin' to lay aroun' camp when they's wo'k to be done. Get along theah now and no mo'

foolishness or Ah'll shuah beat the top o' yo' wo'thless haid off."

And Pluto, thus chidden, sighed a regretful sigh, pointed his ears forward and struck out toward the Hacienda Escobar, nursing a faint hope that there might be oats at the other end of this trip. And Coffin Nails, fishing around in his pocket, drew forth five cartridges and reloaded the empty magazine of his automatic and slipped it into the pistol until the spring catch clicked. He set the safety catch with his thumb and slid the weapon back to its holster.

THE VELVET black shadows of the mesa fled before the lance shafts of the rising moon. Pools of silver in the highlights and purple ebony in the shadows, the mesa stretched like an ocean, mysterious and alluring, to far horizons, its harsh seams and heavy wrinkles smoothed out by the soft touch of the moon, its aged, sinister world weariness transformed into something ineffably youthful, poignant and wistful by the magic of that silver light.

As Coffin Nails rode, he sang. The song he sang was far older than he knew, an echo of haunting sorrow that had come down the years from the day when a Moorish king had bade farewell to Granada. Coffin Nails, giving easily to his horse's free motion, echoed the sorrow of the old song to its final end on a single haunting note.

The soldier stopped suddenly, for the Hacienda Escobar was in view, black and silent in the moonlight, without a light showing.

He brought Pluto to a halt, dismounted and led him off the road, fastening him to a fence post. Then he circled the ranch-house, moving quietly through the Spanish bayonet and the yucca, only stopping once when there was a sudden movement in the black shadows under a cactus not two yards away, followed by a metallic sort of rattle, warning enough to give that place a wide berth. He stood stock-still for a moment. The rattling ceased and something moved with a slow, flowing smoothness and disappeared around behind the cactus.

Thereafter Coffin Nails moved more circumspectly, not that he held the rattlesnake in any dread, but it had suddenly occurred to him that should he come upon Luque, that one would not be as magnanimous as the rattlesnake in giving a warning before he struck.

It was then that his keen nose caught the sudden whiff of burning tobacco, an odor that carries far on a still night. Wetting his finger, he tested the direction of the slight breeze; it was coming from the direction of the road and, judging by the smoke, the outpost was somewhere at a point about halfway between where he had left the road to tether his horse and the ranch-house itself. He had done well in leaving the road when he did.

Staring, he saw a tiny pinpoint of light glow and then drop out in a small shower of sparks. Some one was there, not over two hundred yards away. The average *pelayo* not being overly fond of moving around after dark, it was some of Luque's men on guard, beyond the shadow of a doubt.

In the moonlight's deceptive shadows, the tall yucca plants with their white flowers looked not unlike human beings, ranged in irregular groups and clumps all over the mesa. His eye in ranging rapidly around him had noted one of the groups slightly to his left and rear, a group remarkable for the formation in which nature had grouped it, composed of four yucca plants spaced regularly and forming a perfect diamond design.

Again his eye swept around, then rested, fixed on the group of four yuccas. Long and intently he stared at them.

Somehow the perfect diamond shape did not seem so evident. The nearest yucca seemed nearer than it had been. The diamond had elongated into a spear point.

Then he deliberately turned his back on the phenomenon of the yucca plants and moved forward a few steps, cautiously, and found himself standing near another

tall cactus which stood on the edge of a small arroyo. Again he looked about him very slowly and carefully, his roving eyes sweeping over the four yuccas to his left and rear.

As his eyes swept around he could have sworn that the tail of his eye caught the nearest yucca in movement, a movement which stopped suddenly as his full glance rested on it. The spear point was even more elongated than it had been before.

Starting forward, he suddenly turned to his right, passing behind the cactus plant before him and dropping down into the arroyo.

ONCE in the dry stream bed, Nails peered over the edge and studied the curious actions of the yucca plant or whatever it was. After one good look, he nodded to himself and quietly drew his pistol from the holster, waiting grimly until the man—for it was a man—approached. But whoever it was remained where he was and showed no signs of advancing.

The dry stream bed, twisting and turning, led in the general direction of the ranch-house. Nails, after assuring himself that he was not being followed, made his way swiftly along its tortuous windings. Issuing from it in rear of the ranch-house, he quietly approached the silent building. A dog started barking loudly and rushed out at him, then recognizing a friend, came up wagging its tail.

The side of the house was sheltered by some cottonwood trees, and Nails made his way to these. Picking up a handful of gravel, he threw it at the window above him and waited. In a moment the window shutter opened.

"Why deed you coom, Neels?" a very agitated but sweet voice reproached him.

Nails laughed up for answer.

"Come on down heah, honey," he ordered, and the shutter closed gently again.

Then he watched a small door set deeply in the thick adobe walls, watched it for four or five minutes until he saw it open cautiously and some one, an eager and impetuous some one, who had thrown a black lace mantilla over her head, came running across the open space to the shadows of the trees where he stood.

"Why, oh, why deed you coom, Neels?" she asked breathlessly, her voice throbbing with fear.

Very quietly he drew her to him and stopped her words before replying.

"Because Ah had a lettah from you, Rosita *mía*," he said, drinking in the beauty of her eyes and face as she stared up at him in the shadows.

"But—but—I wrote no letter, *amigo mío*. I swear to you that I wrote no letter."

"Well, somebody done wrote it," he said indifferently. "Anyway, Ah'm heah and that's most impo'tant anyways."

"But Luque is here; he is guarding the house with his men and he has sworn to kill you on sight!" She slipped into Spanish in her excitement, and looked about her fearfully, peering into the shadows.

"Now ain't that just too kind o' Señor Luque!" quoth Coffin Nails in mock admiration. "Ah kinda su'picioned somethin' like that and come aroun' behint."

And he pointed out toward the rear of the house in the direction he had come. As he pointed he looked casually out that way, his eyes resting for a fraction of a second on the corner of the house.

Then his voice went on just as casually—

"But you'd best be runnin' along in now."

His right hand slipped to his pistol and he edged slightly forward so as to be between her and the corner of the house.

"Yeah, you'd bettah be runnin' along; 'tain't any too safe for you to be heah this time o' night."

Reaching down swiftly, he kissed her and pushed her along toward the door, still carefully keeping between her and that corner of the house.

"But—but—" she started to expostulate, then looked up, saw a grim look about the corners of his mouth and the intent stare of eyes and caught the direction of their glance. Suddenly she stiffened.

"Oh, my God!" she said with a catch in her voice and, suddenly slipping from his grasp, was around and in front of him.

The three of them were on him before he could fire. One had appeared from the shadows of the cottonwood trees and grasped his pistol arm while yet the pistol was half drawn. With his free arm he smashed out at the nearest face in front of him, meanwhile struggling with that right arm to free his weapon. The girl was overborne in the rush and struggled to her knees as he fought with the three.

Another one came from somewhere, so that now there were four, and they raged silently, those men, while Nails fought doggedly and grimly, kicking and striking while the man behind him clung to his right arm like a leech in spite of the blows that he rained upon him.

Once he stumbled and nearly went down, then rose again, shaking off his attackers as a stag shakes off the hounds.

Suddenly Rosita was on her feet and had slipped around at his side. Out of the tail of his eye he caught the single glimpse of a white arm raised with something dully gleaming in it, heard a groan behind him and felt the man hanging on to his pistol relax his grip and stumble back into the shadows. The men attacking him, suddenly turned and fled. He stood there, his pistol free, not wanting to fire and bring down the whole gang and alarm the family sleeping within, while the three men slid around the corner of the house and disappeared from view.

"You are not hurt, my dear?" her voice throbbed out of the darkness near him and suddenly her fluttering hands were on him, patting his head and face and chest.

"But come," she whispered. "They will be back; you must come inside. They will not dare enter."

He shook his head absently, wondering why they had not attacked with knives. Evidently they had orders to take him, alive at all costs, and he smiled to himself, grimly and a little mockingly.

Again she was pulling at him, trying to lead him within the shelter of the house. This time he allowed himself to be led.

BEHIND him she closed and bolted the door and there in the pitch darkness Nails' arms went out and gathered in her lithe form and they clung together for a space until he suddenly raised his head, listening intently.

Some one was fumbling at the door.

"Lead me to the back door," whispered Nails, close to her ear, and she obeyed, gliding quietly along ahead of him, one hand on his wrist.

The house was silent. The two moved swiftly out of the corridor and into the covered way which surrounded the central *patio*. In a moment they had arrived at the rear, passing through the kitchen. A small door led down and out from the kitchen.

It was when he started to open this that she clung to him again, passionately, sobbing, begging him not to go forth into the certain death which lurked outside.

But he was not to be dissuaded and, gently removing her clinging arms from about him, kissed her once and turned to the door. This he opened quietly, and with one quick stride he was outside in the night once more.

At the back of the house there seemed to be no one stirring. Nails peered into the half light carefully and then crept, gun in hand, toward the corner leading around to the side where he had last seen the four men.

As he neared the corner of the adobe wall he heard faint whispers proceeding from the other side and moved even more cautiously, arriving at last at a point where he could, by leaning forward a hair's breadth, see what was going on on the side of the house. The whispers were now very near.

He saw a dim shape directly around the corner—a Mexican with his back toward him, a *serape* draped around his shoulders and a huge sombrero on his head. The man was speaking earnestly to a second Mexican and both of them were gazing toward the small door which Nails had entered with Rosita not five minutes before. Two others were at the door. The

second Mexican turned and started toward this too. The nearest man, directly around the corner of the house, started to run, evidently to come around behind the *hacienda.*

As he turned, powerful hands shot out of the darkness and gripped his throat. Nails dragged the kicking, struggling man around the corner and quieted him with a smart tap of the pistol on the side of the head, dropping the limp form to the ground.

Quickly removing the man's sombrero and *serape,* Nails replaced his own campaign hat with the huge straw headgear and wrapped the *serape* about his shoulders.

The prone form of the fallen Mexican made a blur in the darkness. Noting this, Nails swiftly rolled the body behind a bush.

He was not a second too soon, for around the corner of the house came the second Mexican.

"Miguel!" whispered the newcomer.

"*Sí?*" answered Nails inquiringly, and moved toward the man, crouching a little so as to diminish his height.

Whatever the newcomer had to say was left unsaid, for as the American came within striking distance he suddenly straightened up, putting the whole weight of back and shoulders into a single smashing drive of his fist that caught the unsuspecting Mexican square on the point of the jaw. The Mexican went down like a sack of wheat, slumping a little and lying silent on the ground.

Nails blew on his knuckles reflectively and studied the prone man a moment. Then, nodding to himself, he moved quietly toward the corner of the house and rounded it.

Opposite the grove of willows he could see the two other men working at the small side door. So engrossed were they in their task that they did not note his approach.

It was no trick at all to bring the pistol down on the head of one. The other gave a startled gasp as he saw his companion crumple up but had no time to make further outcry as the relentless pistol descended on his head in turn.

It was with an air of disappointment that Nails rose from the examination of the two fallen Mexicans. Luque was not among them. Listening intently in the darkness, he could hear a shuffle of feet and the stamp of a restive horse somewhere near the front of the *hacienda.* Evidently there were many men there.

Nails turned and made his way back to the house, where he retrieved his hat, and struck out toward the mesa, soon finding the dry arroyo down which he had come on his arrival. He issued from this very quietly at the place where he had seen the four cactus plants lined up in their diamond formation. Now there were only three cactus plants. Evidently the watcher at this point had followed him on toward the house and was probably among the missing men peacefully stretched out on the sod near the *hacienda* at this moment.

Smiling, Nails went on, found his horse and, shedding the *serape* and sombrero, mounted and set out for camp at an easy lope.

He had not been five minutes on the road before a very worried and frightened girl, unable longer to bear the uncertainty surrounding the fate of her lover, had stolen down to the corral of the Hacienda Escobar. There she saddled and bridled her own golden sorrel horse. Leading him quietly out the rear of the ranch, she followed a trail that led up into the foothills for a space, then struck out in the direction of the American camp.

CHAPTER IV

CONFINED TO CAMP

MEANWHILE First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody was exceeding wroth. After much pacing back and forth, his hands behind his back, he had finally decided to take active measures against Luque. And he had sent for Coffin Nails only to find that individual among the missing. A sleepy

stable guard finally confessed that he had permitted the lanky soldier to head forth mounted on a horse.

"Sergeant Mueller!" Napoleon Bonaparte Brody's voice was tinged with melancholy. "It is in these small slips that great plans often go awry."

"Vat iss it the Lootenand says?" asked the startled sergeant.

"I say that it is these small failures on the part of subordinates that have wrecked mighty empires." The pudgy lieutenant cleared his throat portentously. "Here I have, after deep cogitation, perfected my plans to strike swiftly and mercilessly only to find that the scheme of operations is thrown out of gear by the defections of one exceedingly unimportant individual. This man Nails must be punished for his unwarranted absence."

"Yah," said Sergeant Mueller sagely, much relieved at being able to understand at least part of what his officer was saying. "Yah, he iss a fresh one, dot guy."

So it was that Nails found no pleasant reception awaiting him on his return.

"Great plans you haff made go awry," snorted Sergeant Mueller as the lanky Nails dismounted at the picket line. "Mighty emperors vill be wrecking demselves on account o' your foolishness if you aind't watchin' your step; big schemes of operations iss disslocaded entirely pecause you aind't around. Yah, dere iss hell poppings goin' on in dis camp."

"Yeah?"

Nails gave an expert flip to the saddle blanket, folding it neatly over the saddle as it lay on the ground. Taking the bridle, he wiped the bits, ran the reins through the headstall and knotted them, making a compact bundle of the entire bridle. Then he laid it across the saddle blanket, first, however, carefully removing the smooth flat links of the burnished curb chain and putting them in his pocket; curb chains, having no numbers on them, are any one's property in the cavalry.

This rite finished, he turned back to the sergeant.

"What's all this speech you been soundin' off, Sa'gent?"

"It's the lootenand. Ragin' undt bellowin' he iss pecause you iss outd pignicking ven he needs you. For vhy iss it anyvays you go prowlin' oudt at nighdt like a long legged tomcat?"

"Well, it shuah ain't been any picnic, Ah'll tell the cock-eyed world. Ah located this guy Luque. He's moonin' around down heah to the Hacienda Escobar and if the lootenant'll stir his stumps we can grab in that baby *muy pronto*. Go tell the Old Man Ah'll lead him right wheah that no account greasah is squattin' on his hunkers all innocent and blissful."

"Iss dot so?" Sergeant Mueller shook his head. "Yah, I'll tell the lootenand, but id'll only be more bush beatin'." And Mueller departed, growling to himself.

In less than five minutes the first sergeant's whistle brought men out of their tents rubbing their eyes sleepily.

"Turn oudt undt saddle up undt make id snabby!" Mueller's voice bellowed down through the camp. In another minute he was with Nails again.

"Der lootenand says he iss goin' to get this Luque."

"*Muy buen!*" Nails picked up his saddle blanket again.

"Budt the lootenand says you gotta stay in camp, in arrest; the lootenand says he iss plumb sick o' your foolishness."

"How's he aimin' to find Luque without me?" Nails put his saddle blanket down again calmly.

"I says to the lootenand, 'We'll maype be needin' Nails to show us diss here Luque,' but the lootenand, he says no, dot hiss plan of campaign iss ready and dot he ain't needin' you at all." Mueller shrugged his shoulders pessimistically.

"Suits me," drawled Coffin Nails. "Ah allows to git me a little bunk fatigue anyways and Ah shuah needs it."

All the same, Nails, lounging by the stacks of baled hay, looked a little wistful as the troop lined up in the darkness and

filed slowly out of camp, leaving the place deserted save for the cooks and their helpers, one or two sick men and a guard of two.

"Ef that Luque takes a notion to come sashayin' around here while the troop's gone he shuah could make a cleanup," soliloquized Coffin Nails as he looked over the deserted camp.

MEANWHILE Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody fared forth into the darkness, his normal desire to catch the bandit more than sharpened by the insults the Mexican had leveled at him as he lay prone on the ground.

The moon had set, leaving the mesa in darkness. The men riding behind him were silent for the most part, chilled a little by the cold breeze that preceded the dawn. Shortly after leaving the camp, the lieutenant sent out an advance guard of four men with instructions to halt at least a quarter of a mile this side of the Hacienda Escobar.

It was these four men that Lieutenant Brody ran into at last after what seemed an hour of chill traveling.

"The ranch is just ahead of us," whispered one of them, and Brody nodded and turned to issue his orders.

Calling his non-commissioned officers, he gave his instructions briefly:

"You will dismount and circle your led horses by platoons," he commanded. "Sergeant Mueller will take the first platoon and attack the enemy's right flank, supported by Sergeant McCoy with the second platoon. I will maintain under my hand the third platoon, which will act as reserve. Battles are won by the side which can throw in the last reserve." He misquoted Bonaparte on this, but no one knew the difference anyway, so it did not matter much.

Sergeant Mueller waited for further words, but none came.

"Vat does the Lootenand vant us to do?" he asked at last.

"To surround and capture the enemy, especially the person of one Luque, the bandit," stated First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody.

"Yah, Lootenand," nodded Mueller, and led his handful of men toward the *hacienda*, followed by Sergeant McCoy.

As the last of McCoy's platoon disappeared into the darkness, Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody set his own forces into motion, said forces consisting of ten men, including the irrepressible Pinky Hassfurther.

"The Old Man ain't leavin' a single lousy guard with the led horses," he whispered to the man on his right, and looked regretfully back at the three clumps of horses, each clump made up of a circle of animals, their heads toward the center where a single man held the bridle reins. "And believe me," growled Pinky, "I ain't especially hankerin' after a long walk back to camp."

"Ain't it the truth!" agreed his friend, and looked anxiously over his shoulder.

Brody halted his ten men after a minute or two and waited, listening in the darkness for the first angry note of battle. All was silence in the direction of the *hacienda*; not a sound disturbed the intense stillness of the hour before dawn, no sound save the slight noise made as the lieutenant strode back and forth before his shivering men, his hands behind his back, his head sunk on his chest in deep thought.

Ten minutes stretched into fifteen, and fifteen into twenty before Brody began to feel a little worried. Then a messenger came through from the front.

"Sergeant Mueller says to tell the Lootenant that there ain't a soul anywheres around the house," he reported in a whisper, "and wants to know what to do."

"H'm, I see; stand by a moment, my man, until I decide," said Brody.

But as so often happens in warfare, the lieutenant had little time in which to decide anything.

There was the sound of scuffling from behind where the led horses were being held, a shout, a sudden flurry of movement and the sound of galloping hoofs.

It seemed to last but a moment or two and there came running a soldier from the direction of the led horses.

"A gang o' greasers jumped me," he panted, "and got away with all the horses o' my platoon!"

Clearly here was time to do something, but First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody did not believe in rash action.

"You say they got all the horses?" he asked. "Of what platoon?"

"Of the second platoon, sir," was the answer.

"H'm, I see."

There was another scuffling sound from the rear and another shout. Brody turned to give his orders to his men and stared in astonishment.

His men had disappeared!

Up the road in the direction of the led horses he could hear the sound of curses and blows and then a shot. His platoon had just faded into the darkness, impelled by a very lively fear of having their own horses stolen in their absence.

Brody pursed his lips firmly and strode away into the night after them.

Meanwhile a fight was raging around the remaining led horses, a fight won by the angry troopers, who drove the bandits away into the mesa. It was Luque himself who withdrew his men and set off in all haste followed by some fifty tattered followers, to race to the defenseless American camp.

COFFIN NAILS' feeling of wistfulness and loneliness did not diminish after the departure of the troop from camp. Rather it increased. There is nothing more desolate looking than a deserted camp with empty, silent tents, the cheerful babble of men replaced by echoing silence.

"And like as not Little Napoleon'll gum mattahs up down theah and get hisself all shot up," he reflected bitterly, which showed that Coffin Nails did not have that blind confidence in the abilities of his commander which should be part and parcel of a soldier's equipment.

And the more he thought about it the worse it seemed until at last he found that his footsteps had led him again to the picket line. He looked longingly at his horse.

"Ah could get down theah and back without even lettin' Little Napoleon see me," he argued with himself, and without more ado started to saddle up.

"Where you figgerin' on moochin' to, Coffin Nails?" It was the voice of Tim Collins, the grouchy and perpetually indignant cook.

"Kinda thought Ah'd mosey along down and take a look at the fun," replied Coffin Nails, tightening his cinch.

"I ain't aimin' meself to stay in any damn' camp when there's a scrap on," announced Collins, and slumped off, returning with his saddle and bridle and equipment. He was followed by four or five others, like minded, including old Pop Hemingway, who had been laid up with lumbago. They all departed for the Hacienda Escobar.

Five minutes later Rosita came riding from the hills into the deserted camp.

For the most part the seven horsemen rode silently, Pop Hemingway letting out an occasional groan as his lumbago gave him a twinge.

All was silent and dark toward the *hacienda*. Coffin Nails strained his ears for some sound which would show that the troop ahead had started something, but nothing came to disturb the vast silence of the night on the mesa. After about twenty minutes' riding he reined in his horse sharply. Far away toward the *hacienda* he had heard a sound like the crack of a rifle.

The little group of horsemen waited for a repetition of the single shot, but none came. Finally they stirred uneasily in the darkness.

"Let's be moochin' on," suggested Collins.

"Wait!" Coffin Nails called for silence. "Heah anything that sounds like hosses comin' this way hell bent fo' election?"

Again they all listened.

Dim and far away, but steadily growing

in volume, they could hear it, the steady beat of many galloping hoofs. They nodded their heads.

"That might be our troop comin' back—and again, it might be Luque's outfit tryin' to put somethin' ovah," Coffin Nails said. "'Pears to me like we'd bettah go kinda easy until we find out."

"By gum!" spoke up Pop Hemingway. "What would our troop come gallopin' back for? They'd come back at the trot. This here outfit's gallopin'; hear 'em? Them's greasers shore as shootin'!"

There was an uncertain stir and muttering among the six.

"Best thing we-all kin do is to lay low until we see what's what," stated Coffin Nails, and so it was agreed.

The volume of sound intensified. The soldiers moved off the road and into the mesquite. Soon they could hear voices above the sound of the hoofs. In another minute a tall Mexican wearing a silver laced sombrero swept by.

"Luque!" whispered Coffin Nails.

He was followed by a crowd of bandits, all riding hard, plying quirt and spur as they dashed by. Bringing up the rear was a group of riderless horses, saddled, led by three or four Mexicans.

"Troop horses!" exclaimed Coffin Nails, and, setting spurs to his mount, he galloped parallel to the road, following the rear of the Mexican column. The other soldiers followed him as he speeded up. Then he drew his pistol and suddenly swung into the column of Mexicans between the last of the bandits and the captured troop horses.

Leveling his pistol at the leading Mexican horse holder, he threw his own mount on its haunches. The six men with him, pistols likewise drawn, drove the led horses off to the side of the road.

There was not a shot fired. The column of Mexicans ahead kept on their way unconscious of the happenings in the rear.

The five or six Mexicans, their hands occupied with the reins of the led horses, made no resistance. Coffin Nails ordered them off their horses and saw to their disarming.

"Pop—" he turned to Hemingway—"how about drivin' herd on these heah hosses and these heah greasahs and gettin' 'em back to the troop. Ef yo' stick on yo' hoss and make these greasahs walk and lead the hosses, you can get 'em considerable ways along the road and meet the troop as it comes back. 'Tain't very far heah to the Hacienda Escobar."

"Sure," grunted Pop Hemingway and barked at his prisoners.

"Meantime we-all kin kinda take a run back toward camp and maybe put a couple o' bullets into them bandits. What say?" Coffin Nails asked the rest.

"You're damn' right!" growled the rest of the group; and without more ado, they set off after Nails, who headed toward camp.

Meanwhile Pop Hemingway had herded his prisoners and the led horses into some sort of column and, with his pistol out and ready, drove them before him down the road toward the Hacienda Escobar.

FIRST LIEUTENANT BRODY, remembering that the great Napoleon had advised strongly against a division of forces, suddenly sent out runners to bring his orphan platoons back to him from their position around the ranchhouse. And in due time Sergeant McCoy and First Sergeant Mueller returned, the latter cursing strange Teutonic oaths.

"*Himmelkruezgranatan donnerwetter!*" swore Sergeant Mueller. "It is bush beatings aboudt undt yet more bush beatings aboudt undt now we haff lost the horses off one platoon alretty, but dere iss von ting we vill nefer lose, I bet ya, undt dot iss dot *dumkopf Leutnant! Herr Gott*, vot a life! Vot a life!"

But like the good soldier he was, Sergeant Mueller breathed forth these maledictions to no one, making use only of the old soldier's right to growl to himself.

"Sergeant Mueller—" First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody appeared out of the darkness—"Sergeant Mueller," he repeated very impressively, "circum-

stances over which we have no control have deprived us of victory. In addition we have suffered severe and heavy losses, the horses of the second platoon—"

"What the hell? Excuse me, Lieutenant, but you say my platoon's horses are all gone?" It was Sergeant McCoy who spoke up, anxious and worried.

"Yes, Sergeant McCoy, the bandits ran into us in the dark and made away with the horses of your platoon. It is a regrettable but none the less self-evident fact—"

"But, Lootenand, vich way hass the bandits gone mit the horses?" Sergeant Mueller was trying to get down to cases.

"Upon that point, I am sorry to state, my information is incomplete," returned First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody, who until that moment had not given a thought to the possible direction taken by the fleeing bandits.

"They're a-heading toward our camp," spoke up a voice out of the darkness near at hand.

"But, *Gott in Himmel*, dey vill steal and burn down de camb!" Sergeant Mueller's voice rose in his excitement. "Ve'll haff to hustle back to our camb or dere'll be no camb ven we get back."

"That is an unpleasant possibility," returned First Lieutenant Brody.

"Yah, now it cooms more bush beatings," grumbled Mueller to himself bitterly, while the men, exercised out of their usual apathy by the insult to the troop in having its horses stolen, crowded around, ominously growling among themselves.

"Me, I left ten dollars in the top o' my trunk locker," said one.

"My best suit o' khaki's there in my trunk locker," said another, and the discontent grew deeper as they realized that they were liable to lose everything they owned.

The growls were deepest and most heartfelt among the men of the second platoon who were faced with the prospect of walking all the way back to camp and then finding nothing but the cold comfort of a robbed and looted camp on their arrival.

"I'm goin' to head home, now, this minute," whispered one.

"You said it, bo," echoed several more, and without a word to any one, practically the whole of the second platoon, some ten men, pulled out in the darkness and doggedly headed toward camp, unnoticed by the troop commander, who still paced back and forth, focusing the intense power of concentrated thought on the problem before him.

And the sullen band of dismounted cavalrymen had not gone two hundred yards before they heard the deep toned voice of Pop Hemingway who, having been a private throughout his whole Army career, was taking advantage of this opportunity to lord it over the four or five Mexican prisoners under his command.

"Come on, you splay footed, hammer toed sons of guns . . . ." He was haranguing them magnificently when a glad cry came from the foremost of the dismounted cavalrymen of the second platoon and the men swarmed around their recovered mounts. Pop Hemingway explained the whole situation to them.

"And Coffin Nails is goin' back single handed to fight them?"

"You said it," agreed Hemingway.

"Me for Coffin Nails!" There were grunts of agreement all around. In a trice they were in their saddles and headed back toward camp.

"But how about these 'ere prisoners o' war?" said Pop Hemingway.

"Put 'em where the sun won't shine on 'em," called back some one, and the second platoon was lost in the darkness, leaving Pop Hemingway sitting his horse, looming above the little group of Mexican bandits who, judging by their own custom in like cases, expected nothing less than to be shot outright.

POP HEMINGWAY, after rumbling deep in his chest a moment, waved them on before him and in another minute or two came up to where Brody was still pacing back and forth.

"What's this? What's this?" he said excitedly on catching sight of the prisoners.

"Jest a few of the enemy I captured," explained Pop Hemingway loftily.

Sergeant Mueller was listening, suspicion in his eyes, but Hemingway paid him no heed.

"I was a-ridin' along the road when ten of 'em jumped out at me," went on Hemingway. "Ten's too many, so I kills five of 'em. The rest surrenders, beggin' for mercy."

"Wonderful," breathed First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody. "Truly epic, worthy of the highest traditions of our glorious Service. I will see that your courage in the face of great odds is fittingly rewarded, Private Hemingway, First Class; I will make it my business to see that your great deed is recorded in the annals of our regiment, Private Hemingway."

"Oh, 'twan't nothin'," said Private Hemingway modestly; then he looked through narrowed and calculating eyes at his troop commander. "Kin I git a three days' pass when this show's over, Lootenant, to go to El Paso?" It can be seen that Private First Class Hemingway was eminently practical and held no great confidence in the rumbling of a distant drum.

"That is a matter we can take up at a more fitting time," returned Brody with dignity; and Pop Hemingway withdrew, his spirits dampened, not neglecting however to aim a vicious and parting kick at the nearest prisoner, who said humbly enough, "*Gracias, señor,*" as though a favor had been done him.

But the sight of the prisoners, trophies, as it were, of war, had the effect of cheering up the lieutenant. He was almost jovial as he turned to Sergeant Mueller.

"Victory will yet perch on our standards," he remarked. "I feel that this series of partial failures will, at the last, redeem itself into success."

"Yah! Aboudt now dey will be burning the camp," returned Sergeant Mueller, thinking of the beloved long stemmed pipe left in his tent, a pipe with a porcelain bowl on which was painted a tender wreath of very purple violets.

"You may give the order to mount, Sergeant Mueller, and we will attack these bandits in the rear."

It did not take a second for Sergeant Mueller's whistle to shrill out and his deep lunged voice to propel the men into their saddles. In a few more seconds the troop, or what was left of it, was ready to move out.

"I can't find my platoon!" Suddenly Sergeant McCoy's anguished accents smote on Sergeant Mueller's ear as the column set in motion. McCoy's horse had been found mysteriously.

"*Ach, Gott,* is it a wet nurse for your platoon I'm becoming? Shud up, say noddings, or dere vill be more bush beatings. Dot platoon of yours is better lost. But it ain'dt lost, don't you be worryin', it'll turn opp like a hull boonch of bad *pfennigs!* Yah, shust blow mess call undt dot platoon vill be dere wid dere tongues hangin' oudt!"

The mystified McCoy dropped back in the column, where he was soon enlightened as to the reason for the absence of his ten men, and gathered what comfort he could from the hope that he might run into them any moment trudging along the road. Where his horse had come from he did not know, but believed that it had escaped from the bandits and returned to the troop and its equine friends.

The troop moved steadily forward in the darkness, each and every man breathing fire and destruction on all Mexican bandits for this night's work, each and every man looking forward in the direction of the camp, dreading to see a telltale column of flame go up from their tents.

They had not been traveling more than twenty minutes when Sergeant Mueller raised his head suddenly.

"It iss shoodings back at camp!" he said to the lieutenant.

Both of them listened. Unmistakably on the chill air of early morning came the sharp, vicious crack of rifle fire, sounding like the distant tappings of tack hammers.

CHAPTER V

SUNRISE FOR TWO

COFFIN NAILS, after sending Pop Hemingway on with the captured horses, wasted very little time in following the bandit column toward the camp. The longer legged and faster American horses soon lessened the distance between the bandits ahead and the little group of cavalrymen following doggedly behind.

Thus it was that when the bandit group suddenly halted, not over five hundred yards from the camp, Coffin Nails had great difficulty in keeping his horse from jamming up on the tails of the rearmost Mexican horses. The bandits never looked around, confident that the men behind them were their own comrades leading the captured horses.

The Mexicans were conferring among themselves. They had already tasted the bitter flavor of steel jacketed lead from that camp and were none too anxious to get a second dose. While the place looked silent and deserted, it might possibly begin to erupt level sheets of whistling bullets at any moment.

Therefore they dismounted and turned over their horses to a few holders and began to creep forward on foot.

Luque himself rode around to the rear of the camp. Neither he nor Coffin Nails knew that the American camp had for its sole defense one lonely and very frightened young girl, who sat fearfully alert on a trunk locker just inside the orderly tent entrance. Rosita, not knowing what else to do, had simply waited.

Coffin Nails studied the horse holders in front; there were not more than five or six of them. It would be no trick at all to capture them and drive off the bandits' horses. At the same time he had too few men to risk the detachment of a single one of them from his already small force.

Ahead of the led horses, creeping toward the camp, was the line of dismounted Mexicans wiggling forward like snakes and ever getting nearer and nearer to that silent group of tents ranged so neatly in order.

Meanwhile Luque, bolder than the rest, had ridden into camp from the rear, looking warily about him as he advanced through the troop street. Suddenly he raised his head sharply. There was a footstep, a rush, and Rosita had appeared at the tent entrance to his right.

"*Madre de Dios!*" she whispered, looking up at him in fright.

"So, you are here!" he snarled, and his fingers clenched and unclenched as though they would tear her to pieces.

She shrank back against the tent, horrified. Slowly he rode his horse at her. She tried to shrink within the tent, but the unyielding canvas only repulsed her.

Leaning over the horn of his saddle, his fingers clutched at her, seeking for her throat. Nearer and nearer they came, evil and sinister; she screamed faintly, her eyes wide with horror.

A shot cracked viciously on the mesa outside of camp.

Luque raised his head sharply. Another shot cracked, another followed it. There came a great shouting and some screaming and the trample of many horses.

It was Coffin Nails who, followed by his five men, had leaped his horses among the Mexican horse holders and had commenced firing, driving the animals toward the camp.

"Each of you guys make a noise like six men," he had ordered, and the cavalrymen were doing their best, and were succeeding in creating an awful riot.

The plunging and rearing of maddened horses, the steady cracking of the pistols, the screams of the frightened Mexican horse holders, and the piercing yells of the handful of cavalrymen not only convinced the dismounted Mexicans, who were close to the camp, that the whole American troop had returned and was attacking them in the rear, but succeeded in convincing Luque as well.

Glaring about him savagely like a trapped wolf, he suddenly spied the picket line on which was tied the horse

ridden by Rosita. Leaning down, he grasped her arm roughly and, half carrying and half dragging her, led her toward the horse. Under the threat of his voice and gesture, she climbed into the saddle. Grasping the horse's reins, Luque put spurs to his own and galloped out of camp by the back way. All thought of his men had left his mind; he could think of nothing but his fierce, jealous rage against this girl. It was nothing less than death that he meditated for her, but a death in which she would realize the fate in store for her and would suffer as she had caused him to suffer.

The dismounted Mexicans on the mesa, caught, as they firmly believed, between the camp which might explode any moment into a hell of rifle fire and the savage attacking troop in the rear, broke out to the side toward the foothills and scattered like a covey of quails.

Coffin Nails, driving the horse holders before him, arrived in the camp just in time to see Luque, leading Rosita's horse behind him, go galloping out the farther end.

He heard a loud shout behind him, and looked back in time to see that it was a reinforcement of cavalrymen who had suddenly appeared.

Instantly he thought it was the troop, arrived at last, not knowing that it was only the second platoon which had broken away, intent on saving its property, and had hurried to be in on the fight before it was finished.

Coffin Nails wasted no time. Without a single backward glance he put spurs to his horse and galloped after the fleeing Luque and his prisoner.

LUQUE rode a clean limbed iron gray stallion, far superior to the average run of Mexican horses. Rosita's horse was one of the best at the Hacienda Escobar and galloped easily along behind the gray as Luque plied whip and spur.

Behind them thundered Coffin Nails on Pluto, a good horse but already tired by the many miles he had covered that day and night.

Luque circled the camp back on the road again, the road which led to the Hacienda Escobar, and down this road the three of them galloped, Coffin Nails some three hundred yards in the rear. He could feel Pluto laboring under him, trying his best to keep up the killing pace, but beginning to falter in his stride.

Crouching low in his saddle, the cavalryman tried to encourage his mount, but his heart sank as he saw the distance between the two in front and himself slowly increase. It was a hopeless chase with all the odds in favor of Luque.

Doggedly stubborn, Coffin Nails kept up his pace even after Luque and the girl had passed from view into the opaque mistiness of dawn.

And Luque was exultant. All danger was behind him, he thought, and his heart began to soften a little toward the girl. Perhaps after all he would not kill her, but only drag her to a priest and force her to marry him as soon as he crossed the Border.

Casting his glance around, he found her staring straight to the front, eyes stormy and rebellious, delicately carved mouth set in a stern line.

"Rosita *mía*—" he called.

She raised her head suddenly and looked at him. In that look was concentrated hatred. Luque frowned.

"Dog!" said Rosita, mad with fury.

Yes, thought Luque, better to kill her; certainly there was no love in her heart for him, and the gringo should never have her. Again he glanced at her sidewise, under his sombrero, and found her head bowed again. *Dios*, but she was beautiful.

A great rage filled his heart that she was not for him.

But Luque should have been looking to to the front. His horse was moving at a swift gallop, flying through the chill dawn like a thunderbolt. The road turned at a sharp angle.

Before Luque had time to know what it was all about the road suddenly seemed filled with horses and cavalrymen. A pudgy little American officer mounted on

a great bay horse blocked the way. His own gray tried desperately to avoid the inevitable collision. He lunged to the right, swinging Luque clear out of the saddle. The great bay horse of the American officer half turned and reared high in the air.

Luque hit the earth, ploughing through the dust on his shoulders. The pudgy American officer, unseated by the rearing of his mount, tried desperately to recover himself, then suddenly landed all in a heap squarely on top the prone bandit, knocking the Mexican into unconsciousness.

Rosita's horse, more nimble footed, jerked to one side and brought up short among the mesquite. Rosita swayed in the saddle, but maintained her seat while a soldier grabbed her reins.

The troop halted in astonishment.

"It iss Luque hisself hereunder!" shouted Sergeant Mueller as he hastily dismounted and aided his officer to rise.

First Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody tried hard to recover the breath that had been knocked out of his ribs by the sudden tumble. He looked down at his prone and unconscious foe. His hands went behind his back and he nodded his head.

"You see, Sergeant Mueller," he said after a moment, his voice returned to him at last, "you see the necessity of planning with the wiliness of a fox and striking with the suddenness of a thunderbolt." He pointed dramatically at the form of Luque as it lay stretched in the dust. "Had I not leaped instantly on the man the second I saw him, he probably would have escaped us again."

"Sure, der Lootenand iss right; fine work, Herr Lootenand," soothed the old sergeant. "But dere is fightings in der camp and ve petter get going before it iss too late!"

Coffin Nails had joined the group, had given one look at the lieutenant standing over the body of Luque and then had swiftly dismounted and taken Rosita in his arms. She, half laughing and half crying, was burrowing her head into his chest as though she had selected that spot for a permanent abiding place and never wanted to leave it again.

So the troop went on, carrying the still unconscious form of Luque swung across his own saddle. Sergeant Mueller, looking back, saw Rosita and Coffin Nails mount their horses and start slowly in the direction of the Hacienda Escobar.

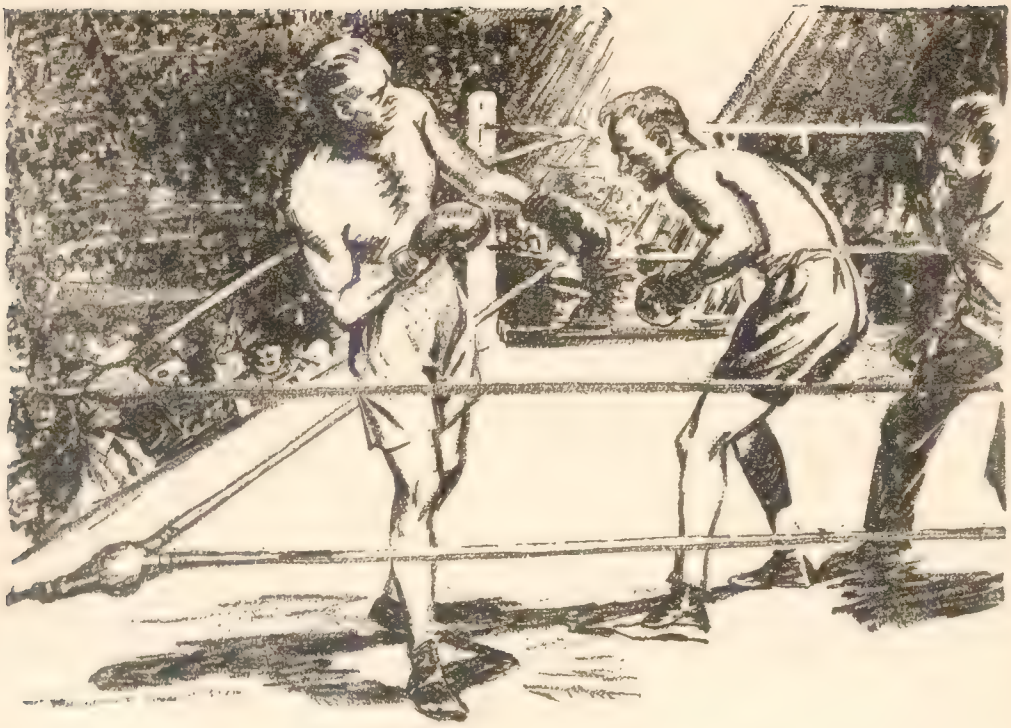
The first rays of the rising sun were lighting up the mesa and the two loomed black against its gold.

"Dere goes anodder fool, dot Coffin Nails," reflected Sergeant Mueller, "but anyhow, he ain't no bush beater—"

"You see, Sergeant Mueller—" Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody was in an expansive mood—"battles are won by the leader who concentrates the superior force at the desired point at the crucial moment; all that precedes that is but preparation; all that follows it is but reorganization. I make so bold as to state that my single handed capture of the ferocious bandit Luque is a very clear illustration of that great axiom."

"Sure, Lootenand," agreed Sergeant Mueller, pleased by the view of the camp in the distance, standing intact with the second platoon moving about the tents, "all battles iss won by the guy that does the least beating apoud the bush, yah."

And he nodded his head sagely, but it was not of Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte Brody he was thinking; it was of the long and lanky Coffin Nails, trying at this minute to make his horse ride close enough to the girl's horse so that he could hold her hand.



PEARLS *à la* MODE

Happy Kid Jackson had the mind of a child and the middleweight championship of the World

By MAX WILKINSON

FROGEYE MARTIN engulfed a pint of Jakie's beer.

"It gives me the hysteria just to think about putting good money in a string of marbles."

The Kid protested feebly.

"She's nice, Frogeye. Honest, Mary Lou's nice. Her hair is yella like—like—"

"Yeah," interrupted Frogeye. "I know the shade. It's swell; it comes in square bottles like gin."

"Aw, Frogeye, she's different. She loves me."

"Now I'll tell one," said Frogeye. "She loves you like you love a left hook on the button."

The Kid looked all of his thirty-two years. His eyebrows went into a huddle and he tried to think of something to say. He gave it up and arose—five feet ten inches in his fancy lisle socks.

Happy Kid Jackson showed the wear

and tear of twelve years of ring warfare. He had the mind of a child, the reach of a heavyweight and the disposition—when he was working—of a hungry grampus. Moreover, he had the middleweight championship of the world, seven trunks of clothes and fifty thousand dollars.

The Kid did not like boxers. And, by way of reprisal, he had made a lot of the scientific boys hate fighting. That is what he was—a fighter. He was a hooker, a puncher. He had stopped so many with his chin in order to land one that his friends daily expected to come across him cutting out paper dolls; others, not so friendly, said he was past that stage and was a hand picked candidate for Bellevue. That did not bother the Kid, however. He just smiled his alleged smile, kept boring in until the other chap dropped, and put his money in a trust fund. That is, all that the blonds did not get. The Kid liked them fair and had the courage of his conviction.

Frogeye Martin was his manager. Frogeye thought that a dollar had a spiritual significance and only middleweights and over should inherit the kingdom of heaven. When he was feeling particularly virtuous, he would swing a towel in any man's corner—for fifty per cent. of the purse. Frogeye was a man of principle. He did not believe in buying ladies anything—except a one way ticket some place. That, perhaps, accounted for the three or four that had sued him for divorce on grounds of cruelty; undoubtedly it accounted for his suffering over the Kid's investment in pearls for his latest inamorata. Another item that added to Frogeye's unhappiness was the fact that the Kid was booked for fifteen rounds the next evening with the sweetest fighter that had come out of Poland since Kosciusko. The Kid was not what he used to be.

"What you gonna do tomorra night?" Frogeye asked.

"I'm gonna take this Polack like he was free lunch," the Kid said modestly.

"And maybe get the indigestion," suggested Frogeye. "They can't touch this boy in a subway jam."

"I'll hit him with a little left along about the third," declared the Kid complacently, "and when he wakes up he'll be a citizen."

"I wisht you hadn't done it, Kid."

"Done what?"

"Bought them marbles."

THE KID could not see very well out of his active eye. The Polish boy was good. He was rattling his fists against the Kid's jaw so fast that it sounded like a snare drum. The champion was not much concerned, though. He was used to that. It was only the third round and he never got to anybody until along about the fifth.

The thing that annoyed the Kid was the other boy's smile. It was pretty; nice and white, with no gold replacements. It was too nice to be in the same ring with a champion. The Kid wanted to do something about it but his hands were finding too many elbows.

The Polish boy was sticking his left hand into the Kid's face, taking whatever the Kid returned on his shoulders, and smiling at some one in a ringside seat. The Kid's good eye was closing fast and he suddenly felt a wave of sentiment. He wanted to smile at some one too—while he could still see. But Mary Lou had had a date.

Frogeye would have been feeling fine if it had not been for those pearls. It was the third round and the Kid had not missed anything yet the Polish boy had thrown at him, and still the champion came in as strong as ever.

Just before the bell the Pole straightened the Kid with a nice left and fell in with a perfectly timed right that broke the laces in the Kid's shoes. The Kid tied him up and took advantage of the opportunity for a bit of pleasantry.

"I hope them teeth ain't real," he murmured solicitously. "I'm gonna give 'em to my little nieces for good conduct prizes." Then— "Who you smilin' at, buddy?"

"I'm smilin' at the lady what said you

was a sucker for blonds and—"

The Polish boy finished his period by dropping a left high on the Kid's jaw that knocked his stature down half an inch. But the Kid did not feel it. He had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Mary Lou was sitting in a ringside seat just under the Polish boy's corner. While Frogeye worked over his legs, the Kid tried to catch her eye—they were big and blue and shadowed by lashes like little fans. But all their indigo magic was for the Pole. The Kid suddenly felt old.

"I reckon I'm through, Frogeye," he said.

"Quittin', are you?" Frogeye snarled. "You don't see the Frogeye quittin', do you?"

"I don't see nothin' worth mentionin'," said the Kid. "Jees, I wisht I hadn't done it."

"Done what?" demanded Frogeye.

"Bought them marbles."

Frogeye jumped up.

"She's done it, hey?" he shrilled.

"Yep—she's crossed me," admitted the Kid.

Frogeye's eyes filled with tears.

"Jees, Kid," he said. "I love you like a father. I'll get them marbles if . . ."

He followed the Kid's eye until his predatory gaze was glued to a round white throat that seemed too delicate to support a string of pearls, each of which was approximately the size of a mature hazel nut. Frogeye felt glorified.

The Kid got out to the center of the ring just in time to catch a flock of lefts and rights that came from nowhere. They came so fast that his bridgework chattered as if he had a chill. At the end of the first minute it was a foregone conclusion among the experts that a new champion was about to be crowned; and Frogeye Martin had worked his way around the ring until he stood over Mary Lou.

He rapped his derby with old world courtesy and grinned wolfishly.

"My boy friend wants them marbles back," he said lightly. "I and he has a deal on with the uncle up in the Avenoo."

Mary Lou turned as white as a lady who cares about her complexion decently can, and murmured to the gentleman in the next seat:

"Give this baby the bum's rush, sweetheart. He's got illusions."

Frogeye lost his composure.

"Illusions, hey!" he yelled. "Ain't no dame can insult the Frogeye. Gimme the Kid's prop'ty!"

He made a wild grab for the pearls just as the Kid neatly stopped one that hung him on the ropes, his freely perspiring back just over his manager. The Kid came off on the rebound and his demoralized left fist smacked in the middle of the Polish boy's smile.

Mary Lou screamed as she felt the string come away in Frogeye's hand; and Frogeye yelled as it broke and the pearls cascaded over his shoulder on to the canvas of the ring. They rolled beneath the feet of the fighters, shimmering in the hard light like moon drops.

The Kid saw the Polish boy's smile vanish and one hand fly to his mouth. That was enough for the Kid. He did not ask much of life. He murmured something appropriate and drove a pair of punches into the body before him, the aggregate length of which would not have totaled twelve inches—or a string of pearls. It was another day.

"What happened?" asked Frogeye in the dressing room.

The Kid laughed so hard that he nearly fell off the rubbing table.

"That pretty boy dropped his hands. He thought them marbles was his teeth!"

Frogeye let out a yell.

"They's a beer up to Jakie's on me!"

"No—on me," corrected the Kid. "They was paste, anyways."

War is Hell—but

IT HAS ITS POINTS

By CLEMENTS RIPLEY

BABE McCLUNG had just made his seventh straight pass. He breathed on the dice.

"Let it lay. Comin' to papa!"

Heads clustered around the blanket. Nickels, quarters, half dollars showered down.

Corporal Massey leaned against the wall of the mess shack and clicked the coins in his pocket, forlornly and yet with a certain pride. He had a first class hunch that Babe could not make another pass, but—this was a privates' game. His stripes, hardly two weeks old, were far too new and far too precious to risk. Other non-coms, Sergeant Gans for instance, might gamble with privates; but not Bugs Massey. He watched Babe swing his arm back with a mighty exhortation.

"Cheese it!"

The lights snapped out. Coins, hastily grabbed for, rattled on the floor. There was a rush; feet clattered in the dark; a door slammed.

"Halt there, you men. Turn on that light!"

The sound of flight had died away. Obligingly Massey stepped over and threw the switch.

The light disclosed a sheepish group at the far end of the mess hall—Sergeant Gans, in undershirt and breeches, and three privates in various stages of undress,

who had missed the door in the dark. It further disclosed the thin, trimly uniformed figure and keen precise features of Lieutenant Acker, fresh from the training camp, who had joined the company yesterday.

He surveyed them coldly. This was his first experience in maintaining discipline.

"You men have been gambling," was his pronouncement.

There was no answer. His eye left the four at the end of the room and came to rest on Massey, secure in the consciousness of his own innocence, still standing by the mess table with its guilty blanket.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Why, yes, sir, there was a little game," Massey told him easily.

The officer's glance dropped to the stripes on his sleeve. His mouth tightened.

"Hm! So I see." He indicated the four with a jerk of his head. "You men get to bed," he directed, and turned back to Massey. "I want to see you in the orderly room, Corporal."

"Why, sir, if the Lieutenant will pardon—"

But already the officer had turned on his heel and was walking briskly down the aisle between the tables. With a shrug Massey turned out the light and followed.

In the orderly room Lieutenant Acker seated himself in the swivel chair and swung it around to face him.

"So you were gambling in a game with privates, Corporal?"

"Me, sir? No, sir. I wasn't in the game."

"Hm! What's your name, Corporal?"

"Massey, sir. And I beg the Lieutenant's pardon, but I wasn't gambling."

Lieutenant Acker was new to the Army. He had only come to the company the day before, and now, owing to Captain Thomaston's having gone to the hospital with influenza that afternoon, he found himself in command with nothing but his training camp technique to go on. He knew nothing about Massey or his record, and appearances were against him.

He frowned and pursed his lips.

"I'd advise you to be very careful, Corporal. An official misstatement is a serious business."

Massey flushed.

"I was not playin', sir," he asserted positively. "I'd just stopped to look on."

"Oh!" The officer studied him. "Oh, I see. Well, I'll have to take your word for it, of course."

Massey's thought was, "You bet your sweet life you'll take my word for it." There was a finical precision about Lieutenant Acker that irritated him.

Aloud he only said, "Yes, sir," and half turned to go.

But Lieutenant Acker had a feeling that there was something incomplete somewhere. He knew that a crap game in barracks was nothing very serious and that a good many company commanders winked at it so long as it was not thrust in their faces. But he was new and he wanted desperately to make good. One of the things his instructors at the training camp had stressed was the danger of letting your men walk over you in the beginning.

He said:

"Just a minute, Corporal. I'll tell you when I've finished. You know the regulation about gambling in barracks?"

"Why, yes, sir."

"Then why didn't you break the game up when you found it?"

Massey stared at him, genuinely bewildered. Who ever heard of a non-com breaking up a crap game? And anyhow, there were sergeants there and plenty of corporals who outranked him.

He said:

"Why, I didn't know the Lieutenant would mind, sir. The men 'most always have a little game goin' after payday."

There was a blue bound copy of "Army Regulations" on the desk. Lieutenant Acker tapped the cover with a thin knuckle.

"You see these regulations, Corporal? Well, just take it for granted that I object to any breach of them, any time. They're made to be enforced, and they're

going to be enforced. That's part of a non-commissioned officer's job. Do you understand?"

"Why—yes, sir."

"All right. Just keep it in mind. And remember that what's wanted isn't excuses but results, and a non-commissioned officer that doesn't deliver them will find himself back in the ranks. That's all."

He swung back to the desk and the intricacies of a monthly ration return. He rather flattered himself that he had put it pretty neatly and made a good beginning.

"Well, for cryin' out loud in the night!" was Corporal Massey's comment as he closed the door carefully behind him.

At first he was merely bewildered. Then he remembered that Gans had been in the mess hall when he turned the light on and a quick sense of injustice took hold on him. Why hadn't he picked on Gans, who was senior and had been in the game besides?

It might have occurred to him that Gans had been in his undershirt with no insignia of rank, and that the new lieutenant had not yet had time to learn the faces of his men; but just now there was no room in his mind for anything but his grievance. He had come out of the orderly room with the tolerant contempt of the old Army man for a new Reserve officer, but by the time he had got to bed he had made up his mind that for some unexplained reason the lieutenant had it in for him.

A NIGHT'S sleep and a little reflection brought calm, but all the same the incident had left a bad taste in his mouth. Massey was proud of his record as a soldier and this was the first time in all his service that he had ever been called on the carpet for anything. It irritated him to have it happen just because some little uplifter out of a training camp wanted to strut his stuff.

But although it had never happened before, he was to find that it could happen again.

The next day was Saturday. At five minutes of eleven, when the call had gone for inspection and the men had clattered outside and were forming in front of the barracks, Massey sat on his cot in the deserted squad room and polished his shoes, preparatory to going to town that evening. He was non-commissioned officer in charge of quarters for the day, and so, by a custom of long standing in the company, was not required to stand inspection.

At this moment, as luck would have it, Lieutenant Acker happened to come through the room.

Massey dropped the shoe he was working on and came to attention. The lieutenant stopped and regarded him with cold inquiry.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why—nothing, sir."

"Get out there then. Didn't you hear the call go for inspection?"

"I'm in charge of quarters, sir," Massey explained a little sullenly, with the thought of last night still rankling in his mind.

One of the things they had impressed on Lieutenant Acker at the training camp was that a soldier obeyed first and argued, if at all, afterward. His face hardened.

"Did you hear me? Get your equipment and get out there—quick!"

Massey made one more attempt at explanation.

"The man in charge of quarters don't stand no inspection, sir . . ."

Lieutenant Acker was on the watch for somebody to try to put something over on him. What was more, this was an excellent chance, right in the beginning, to establish the fact that when he gave an order he intended to have it obeyed.

He took a step closer and his eyes narrowed.

"When I give you an order, I don't want excuses, I want action. Snap into it now!"

Massey hesitated for just the fraction of a second. Then he shrugged and turned to his wall locker. The lieutenant watched him an instant and then turned and went on.

It so happened that Massey had taken his new breeches to the tailor that morning to have them cut with a flare over the knee. He took a good deal of pride in his appearance and there was a girl down town he intended to impress. His only other ones, the pair he had on, had a grease stain down one side and a three cornered tear at the knee. However, he did his best. He made a quick change to the newly polished shoes, slipped on a clean blouse over his undershirt, picked up his rifle on the fly and got down stairs just in time to make the formation.

Lieutenant Acker inspected as he did everything else, meticulously. Massey watched him confidently as he took the bolt out of his rifle to squint through the bore, rubbed his finger inside the trigger guard for traces of dust or grit, and tossed it back. There was no time, day or night, when his rifle could not stand inspection.

Then the officer stepped back and looked him up and down. His eye came to rest on the tear at the man's knee. He turned to the sergeant.

"Take that man's name and have him report in the orderly room."

He passed on to the next. Massey did not move so much as an eyelash, but a dull flush mounted slowly from his collar to the roots of his hair.

"You accustomed to coming out for inspection in rags, Corporal?"

Massey stood rigidly by the door, his face hard.

"No, sir." He bit the words out sullenly.

"Those the only breeches you have?"

It was on the tip of Massey's tongue to explain that he had taken his only other pair to the tailor, but resentment checked the words. He was through explaining things.

"No, sir," was his answer.

"Hm!" Lieutenant Acker's lips compressed themselves into a thin line. "You have another pair then. I don't see that there's much excuse for your turning out in any such shape as that. By the way, you're the man I had in here last night on account of that gambling, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you're the man who was upstairs lying on his bunk this morning, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right!" curtly. "Now just get this into your head, Massey. You're not putting anything over on me. Don't get the idea that because you have your stripes—" he jerked a nod toward the man's sleeve—"you can get away with anything. If you want to keep them, you'd better change your attitude, and do it right away."

He pulled the punishment book toward him and poised his pencil over it.

"You may think you have some excuse because you didn't expect to turn out for inspection this morning. But this man's Army isn't run on excuses—" a quotation from one of the training camp instructors—"it's run on results. Now I'm not going to be hard on you, but you'd better think that over." He made a note in the book. "Confined to quarters for forty-eight hours. That's all, Corporal."

MASSEY saluted, turned on his heel and went out of the orderly room in a rage. It was not the punishment — forty-eight hours was nothing, even though he would have to break his date with his girl—but the manifest unfairness of it. That rankled—that and the first entry that had ever stood on the book against his record.

"What's eatin' on you?" somebody inquired jocosely as he stalked into the squad room, his face like a thundercloud.

Massey slammed his rifle into the rack.

"Ride me, will he? The damn' little two-spot!"

What Lieutenant Acker lacked in experience he made up in energy and attention to detail. In the next month, while Captain Thomaston was convalescing from influenza, he ran the company and on the whole ran it very well.

Thomaston had been inclined to be easy going about detail. Detail was

Lieutenant Acker's strong point. Nothing seemed to get by him. He brought the equipment up to accord with the letter of regulations. He harassed the cooks and the mess sergeant until the mess was as good as human ingenuity and the ration allowance could make it.

"Work 'em and feed 'em and never let 'em get away with anything," had been the formula taught at the training camp, and it became his watchword. And it got results. The company was well drilled, well fed, well equipped, and the discipline was good. It would have been better perhaps for a little more elasticity. A more experienced officer would have known when to let down and where. Lieutenant Acker, with his eye on the day when the regiment would sail for France, never let down at all.

Lieutenant Acker was not infallible and he made one mistake common to new officers. Like most executives who work by formula and are more interested in results than in men, he was slow to learn the names and faces of his command. Massey, however, had been impressed on his mind during his first forty-eight hours; consequently, when there was work to be done, he was more likely than not to call on him, in a nervous anxiety to get things started in the shortest possible time. Without in the least realizing it, he fell into the habit of saying "Corporal Massey" instead of indicating somebody else by an indefinite "You, there!"

Alert for trouble, Massey very quickly decided that the lieutenant was riding him, and what was worse, riding his squad. He took to checking off the number of times they were called on for some spur-of-the-moment job in comparison with other squads, and found some cause for a grievance and imagined more.

To his credit, he said nothing about it to his men. He took a good deal of pride in his small command and he knew instinctively what the effect of that would be. But he did confide in his girl in town, who in turn told Sergeant Means, who brought it back to the squad room.

An hour later the second squad of the first platoon were telling the world that they were getting a dirty deal.

Nothing demoralizes men so quickly. At the next formation they went through the drill sullenly and without snap or swing. The lieutenant checked them half a dozen times and ended by detailing them for extra fatigue that afternoon.

That clinched it. Lieutenant Acker had it in for them. From then on they pursued the immemorial tactics of abused men, slouching through their work as slowly as possible, being as sullen as they dared to be. They were being ridden and they knew it.

Massey would have been superhuman if he had not sympathized with them, but in spite of that he did his work, thoroughly if without enthusiasm, and even made half hearted attempts to check shirking. Naturally, since they held him responsible for their plight, this did not tend to make him popular. Fatigue details and call-downs and company punishments multiplied. Finally, when two of his men went absent, he carried his troubles to the first sergeant.

"What's he ridin' me for?" he wanted to know.

Sergeant Svenson, a slow speaking, gentle Norwegian, old in the Service, regarded him from under blond brows.

"What you deadbeatin' for?" he countered. "You do your work an', soldier, they don't nobody ride you. You fallers actin' like a bunch o' guardhouse bums."

Massey said:

"Well, he started it. He's been ridin' me ever since that first night when he give me a bawl-out for not bustin' up a crap game in the mess shack. Whyn't he step on Gans? He was standin' right there all the time."

The first sergeant looked at him keenly.

"Listen, you!" he told him, "I been sixteen year in this man's Army an' I hear every day 'bout officer iss ridin' somebody—but I ain't never seen it yet. Now you go back by your squad an' tell Peterson shave them whiskers off his face before Sa'day, an' tell Stanislowitz take the sag outa his pants an' snap out, an'

forget that hooey 'bout lieutenant iss ridin' you. You do your work, mind your business, you get along fine."

Massey went back to the squad room to lie on his bunk and brood over his wrongs. The first sergeant waited for a convenient time and spoke to Lieutenant Acker.

"If the Lieutenant will excuse—Corporal Massey, he think he iss gettin' raw deal, sir."

Lieutenant Acker frowned. The second squad of the first platoon was becoming a sore spot.

"Did he come whining to you about it?"

"He iss spoken to me, yes, sir. 'Bout the squad."

Said Lieutenant Acker:

"What's the matter with that man is that he's a deadbeat. And he's making deadbeats out of that whole squad. They won't be worth a continental by the time we get to France, if it keeps up. He never should have been a corporal in the first place."

The first sergeant pushed his hat on one side and scratched his head.

"I don't know, sir. Always he was good man till lately. I don't know what's got into him."

The lieutenant tapped the desk with thin, impatient fingers.

"Trouble with him is, he's one of these fellows who will go just as far as he thinks he can. When I first came he started in to see how much he could put over on me. I had to check him up twice in two days."

"He always had good record up to now," the first sergeant protested uncomfortably. "I think maybe he iss sick or somet'ing."

The other laughed shortly.

"He's a born goldbrick," he said. "Don't let him fool you, Sergeant. He'll ruin that squad if he goes on."

The first sergeant scratched his head again. Up to a few weeks ago Massey's record had been flawless. But the first sergeant had his company to think of. Rot like that spreads fast and no man is as important as the organization.

"Vell," he said slowly, "Lieutenant could bust him, sir."

Lieutenant Acker thought that over a moment and shook his head.

"No, I won't alter any of Captain Thomaston's arrangements. I'll speak to him about it when he comes back."

THE CONVERSATION would have had no effect one way or the other except to confirm Lieutenant Acker's opinion of Massey if it had not happened that the company clerk, checking over the morning report behind the thin board partition, overheard it. Company clerks are notoriously leaky mouthed and this one was no exception. Within a couple of hours it was all over the organization that the lieutenant had said the second squad of the first platoon were a bunch of deadbeats and that their corporal was the worst deadbeat of the lot.

Massey heard it with a sullen tightening of his jaw and a hardening of his eyes. He changed his clothes and went to town, came back drunk and noisy, woke up half the squad room, and overslept so that he missed reveille.

"Deadbeat, huh? All right, to hell with him."

In the month that followed he went on the punishment book four times, was drunk twice, and kept the company commander *pro tem* in a continual state of cold exasperation which the first sergeant began to share.

It was becoming Lieutenant Acker's conviction that he had made a mistake when he decided to wait until the captain came back before reducing Massey. Still, a sedulous reading of his "Officers' Manual" assured him that the company was the property of its commanding officer and that a subordinate did well to keep his hands off so far as charges were concerned. He decided to let things go as they were until Captain Thomaston came back, but it was open secret that Massey would be reduced as soon as he did.

Then the rumor went through the com-

pany, confirmed by the company clerk, that Captain Thomaston had been transferred and was not coming back.

Massey shrugged his shoulders when he heard it.

"I can kiss my stripes goodby," was his comment, and he proceeded to drop his work and go to town, although it was only the middle of the afternoon.

He was absent ten days and came back red eyed, white faced, and shaky from a prolonged drunk. A summary court-martial sentenced him to reduction to the ranks and twenty days in the guardhouse. Lieutenant Acker made out the confinement slip and sent him down with the man in charge of quarters. The first sergeant shook his head unhappily, for he knew the first steps in making a bad soldier out of a good one.

"It iss a pity," he said. "The faller must be crazy."

The officer's thin lips tightened.

"That man's a born deadbeat, Sergeant. I'm sorry he's turned out this way, but a wartime Army is no place to coddle a man that doesn't hold up his end. Results are what we're after—results."

So for twenty endless, blistering days Massey spread hot tar on the new cantonment road and came in at night to gulp his slum without washing or changing his clothes and to lie on the steel slats of his bunk and think about Lieutenant Acker.

He went into the guardhouse a sulky youngster with a bewildered grievance, which an experienced company commander could have straightened out in a half hour's talk. He came out hard mouthed and sullen with a habit of watching people out of the corners of his eyes.

Meantime Captain Thomaston's transfer had gone through. The new company commander was a red faced, thick necked bull of a man named McDougal—one of the hardboiled school. He ran over Massey's record on the punishment book, heard what Lieutenant Acker had to say about him, and called him in for a ten minute session—the fist-on-the-table, you're-not-getting-away-with-a-damn'-thing sort of talk.

Massey listened with a face as blank as a wall, but once or twice his eyes slid furtively to the far corner where Lieutenant Acker's keen, cold profile bent over the fund books, and as he went out of the orderly room his mouth twisted up on one side.

"Hard, huh? Well, you ain't the only one." And to an imaginary Lieutenant Acker, "As for you, you damn' little civilian, you got somethin' comin' to you."

He found now that this attitude, coupled with his guardhouse experience, gave him a certain standing with the habitual bad characters of which every company has a sprinkling. In order to maintain it he resorted to a series of small annoyances—getting out of step deliberately to spoil the appearance of the platoon at formations, slouching through his work, receiving orders with a studied look of insolence calculated to irritate an officer without giving him anything definite to lay his hand on. Occasionally, when Lieutenant Acker had the company alone he "gave him the bird", which consists of holding the lips tight closed and blowing through them, and is of all sounds perhaps the most insolently contemptuous, and the hardest to locate. It made the men laugh and the officer flush, and it was meat and drink to Massey.

On payday he went absent again—five days this time—and came back noisily drunk. He stood outside the barracks and abused the officers by implication in tones that could not fail to carry to the orderly room.

This time, before a special court, he was sentenced to two months' confinement, not so much because of his offense as in view of his past record.

"The man's a guardhouse bum," Captain McDougal declared. "Well, we won't have to take him to France. He'll do something pretty quick that'll get him a general court and Leavenworth, and then we'll get rid of him."

But Captain McDougal was wrong. There is no record of the guardhouse's ever having made a good soldier out of a bad one, but it does frequently teach a man caution.

Massey was a very different man from the corporal who had been so proud of his new stripes a short time before, but those last two months had taught him the folly of trying to buck the system with small defiances. What was more to the point, his bewildered resentment against what he considered a raw deal had crystallized into a cold, steady hatred of the man who had given it to him. He was going to get even with Lieutenant Acker for the loss of his stripes, for the ruin of his record, and for those dragging days and nights in the guardhouse.

It is easier to build up a bad record than to live one down, but as the weeks went by it was impossible that Massey's keeping off the punishment book should go unnoticed.

"It's that last jolt in the mill that's put the fear of God into him," was McDougal's judgment, given with a nod of satisfaction.

Acker agreed and went a step farther.

"Getting a promotion and a little authority went to his head. Now he's been snapped out of it, he may make a good man yet."

But the first sergeant scratched his head and there was a crease between his blond brows.

"I don't know," he ventured doubtfully. "I don't like how that faller luke, someway. Always he iss layin' on his bunk—don't say not'ing to nobody. I think maybe he iss goin' crazy, the way he luke." He shook his head slowly. "I don't know. Seem like he was nice young faller till yust lately."

But it was results that interested Lieutenant Acker. He had his training camp theories of discipline rigidly fixed in his mind. He had carried them out to the letter, and now they were taking effect. It made him think that something could be done with Massey after all.

IN A GRAY September dawn Massey leaned sodden elbows on a smashed heap of stonework and peered wearily through the drizzle. What was left of the first platoon after two days of fighting had taken a doubtful shelter in the cellar of what had once been a farmhouse.

Somewhere to the right was the rest of the company—presumably. No one had seen anything of them since last night. Somewhere to the left were other American troops, but nobody seemed to know where or what troops they were. Behind lay a sea of mud, churned to a bloody soup by yesterday's advance. And in front were the Germans, starved, disorganized, their morale gone, ready to break any minute, as everybody knew. Everybody, that is, except the Germans. They pig-headedly persisted in behaving as though they were on the offensive.

Occasionally in the cold mist—it was impossible to judge direction—artillery thudded or a machine gun stuttered viciously. The intervals between were filled with a heavy, tense silence.

There were sixteen men in the shelter, the survivors of the forty-odd who had started day before yesterday. A few leaned against the improvised parapet. Most of them sat about dejectedly with their feet ankle deep in the water that filled the cellar, and spoke bitterly of the S. O. S. At one side a portion of the floor still hung overhead and gave a small shelter. Some of the men had piled stones beneath it until they made a platform above the water level. Half a dozen of them lay there, huddled together for warmth and lack of space, and dozed fitfully, twitching and coughing as stale remnants of gas fumes caught their lungs. When one of them got up for some reason, another instantly crawled in and took his place.

None of them had eaten for over twenty-four hours, except those few who had foraged among the dead during yesterday's advance and managed to salvage a few iron rations. However, the foraging had been poor. That ground had been

taken and retaken four times in the past week.

Massey stared into the chill mist and listened to the rattling of his teeth. He honestly did not know whether they were chattering because he was cold or because he was scared. He had been both for so long now that they had mingled in his mind until he could not tell which was which.

But for the moment he was not thinking of the cold or of the Germans somewhere in the fog ahead. He was wondering why Lieutenant Acker was watching him.

It had been going on for an hour now, ever since there had been light enough to see anything at all. The first time he had happened to glance back and catch the lieutenant's eye on him, he had supposed it was chance. But after it had happened several times and each time the officer had looked away with elaborate carelessness, he knew it was not.

The lines which cold and hunger and sleepless nights had etched in his face hardened. A suspicion was beginning to crystallize in his mind that the little martinet somehow realized how close he had come to not being here at all this morning. That last half mile, after dark, when the platoon had wormed through the mud on their bellies to their present position—twice a star shell had shown him the lieutenant, pressed close to the ground, not more than fifteen feet away.

The second time he had shifted his rifle cautiously—his finger had itched on the trigger. But he had not done it. Now he wondered why.

He did not see how Acker could have seen; but why was he staring like that this morning?

He twitched his shoulders uneasily. Foolishness, of course. Probably the dirty little rat was trying to think of something to bawl him out for. He wished that he had him just once where he could get at him without a sure general court and Leavenworth.

He turned his head again with affected casualness and met those keen, cold eyes.

But this time Acker did not look away. Instead he hesitated an instant and then splashed toward him with the air of a man who has made a sudden resolution. Massey watched him come out of the tail of his eye, and his mouth twisted contemptuously. Let him holler—he could not prove anything.

The officer stood beside him now. He glanced at the nearest man, some ten feet away, and lowered his voice.

"Massey," he said, "I've had my eye on you."

Massey said nothing. His face was hard. He eyed the officer warily.

But the latter was going on—

"I've been watching you ever since we came to France."

"Yes, and a hell of a long time before that," was what Massey would have liked to say.

"I wouldn't have said anything this morning, but—well, things are uncertain, of course, and something might happen to a man any time. And I wanted you to know that I was watching you yesterday during the attack."

Massey stiffened. Then that was it! He had seen it—that stealthy shift of his rifle, the finger caressing the trigger.

"You handled yourself well in that show," the lieutenant was saying. "I want you to know that I know it. You understand?"

"Yes, sir." Bewildered, he waited to see what was coming next.

"I'm glad to see that you've snapped out of your old ways and taken a brace."

No answer. No relaxing of the sullen lines of his face. But Massey understood. Going to square everything with a little soft soap.

The officer seemed a little disconcerted. He had evidently expected something different. Then, as if to make himself plainer, he said:

"I just wanted you to understand that I know you're trying, Massey, and you'll find me behind you every inch of the way. You've got some things to wipe out, but you can wipe them out and your officers will help you. Nobody's going to hold past mistakes up against you. Keep on

the way you're going and you'll get your stripes back. You understand?"

"Yes, sir," stonily.

The officer hesitated.

"I'll be right behind you every step of the way," he told him again. "I want to see you make good."

There was no answer. Lieutenant Acker eyed him uncertainly.

"I—well, I just wanted you to know."

Still no answer—not so much as the flicker of an eye. At length he said—

"Well, that's all I wanted to tell you." And a moment later he turned and splashed back across the cellar.

Massey drew a long breath and turned back to face the drizzle again. So that was it—he had seen last night, or guessed. Scared, huh? He nursed the thought with triumphant malice. Buy him off with a mouthful of bootlick, would he, and a set of corporal's stripes? The hell he would, the yellow pup!

AT TEN o'clock, almost to the minute, there was a sound like a railroad train. The men ducked instinctively. There was a crash fifty yards behind the position and a black fountain of mud shot up.

Another followed it. Away to the rear American guns began to thump. An artillery duel sprang into life. Shells raced overhead with a continuous roar. Around the cellar things began to happen. Geysers of liquid mud gushed. The air quivered with a tremendous, echoing smash. The men crouched close to the walls or flattened themselves behind piles of rubble.

Huddled in the water at the bottom of the front wall, Massey clutched his rifle and thanked God for the deep mud. So far the projectiles were burying themselves before they burst.

Then there came the terrific, whistling shriek of a shell headed straight for them. For a fraction of a second every one was rigid. Then it hit a pile of loose rock at the edge of the shelter and burst.

The earth rocked. A hail of slugs and steel fragments swept the cellar.

Massey's first thought was that he had been killed. He raised his head, slowly, unbelievingly. Five of the sixteen men of the platoon sprawled grotesquely on the floor. The water around them was tinged with red. A sixth stared up with half a face, and that half terrible and clay colored.

Lieutenant Acker still stood with his back to the wall, but now, as Massey watched, his knees began slowly to bend and a puzzled look came over his thin face. He slid down, held upright by the wall behind him until he collapsed sideways.

Heedless of the shells still shaking the earth around them, Massey splashed across to him. The lieutenant was still alive for his eyes were open and as he bent over him, his lips moved soundlessly. But the left side of his blouse was shredded just above the hip and as the soldier looked, the blood began to ooze through.

They carried him into the little shelter under the overhanging floor. As Massey laid his slicker over him his lips moved again, this time in a terrible, choking whisper—

"Sergeant Walewski—carry on . . ."

Massey went out into the open part of the cellar. At the base of a chimney he found Sergeant Walewski—what was left of him. He took stock. Nine privates were making themselves as small as possible against the foot of the walls. The shells still thudded and crashed.

At the end of an hour, while they huddled there, numb, teeth chattering in the drizzle, the ground quivering around them, a lone medical officer suddenly appeared from nowhere.

He was lost and pessimistic. His first aid station had been blown to hell and he was looking for the 410th Infantry. Did anybody know where it was?

Nobody did. Nobody knew anything about any infantry. Some one ventured a suggestion that they might be on the left.

The medical officer shook his head.

"Off here?" he said, gesturing. "No-

body off there. That bunch pulled out long ago, and anyhow, it wasn't the 410th."

"Where'd they go?" Massey wanted to know.

The medical officer waved a vague arm. "Over there, somewhere."

There was an excited murmur. "Over there" was the rear.

The medical officer did not know anything about that, but they were gone. He had just been over that ground himself.

The men eyed each other uncertainly. Massey changed the subject by asking him to look at the lieutenant. He led the way to the shelter.

The medical officer tore away the remnants of the blouse and exposed a patch of torn flesh. Presently he got to his feet again.

"He'd do," he said, "if you could get a stretcher to him. Failing that, the best thing is to keep him quiet where he is."

He brushed off his hands and came out of the shelter. He glanced at the sea of mud, spurting black fountains.

"Hell," he said, "you'd never get a stretcher through that in this world."

"We could carry him out," some one suggested.

"By the head and feet? You'd kill him in a hundred yards, even if you didn't connect with a shell. Keep him quiet. That's his best chance right now. Later, maybe, when the shelling slackens, you can get a stretcher up to him."

He climbed out of the cellar and wandered off into the fog again. The men looked at each other. One of them voiced what was in everybody's mind.

"Say, if that bunch on the left has pulled out—"

Massey said:

"Forget it, you ape. What's a pill roller know about it?"

"Didn't you hear him say—"

"Forget it. If there was a retirement ordered we'd have heard about it. Ain't you learned yet that all a pill roller knows is CC and iodine?"

"Orders? How we gonna get orders when they don't nobody know where we are? Hell, I don't even know myself. If the outfit's retirin' there's no sense stickin' here and gettin' a free trip into Germany."

There was a chorus of agreement to that. Massey said—

"Who the hell said the outfit's retirin'?"

The argument became heated. Finally Massey said:

"All right, one of you dumb eggs get out an' crawl around some. For all you know, that bird's a spy."

"Spy me eye! Crawl around yourself."

There was another wrangle, finally settled by a resort to the dice. The lot fell to a big, slow witted Pole named Lechinski.

At the end of a nervous hour Lechinski crawled back over the edge. He reported that he had been halfway to Berlin and found nothing.

In the midst of the clamorous debate that followed there came that warning whistle and shriek. Nine privates hurled themselves on their faces. There was a crash and again the cellar was swept by whizzing fragments. This time only six got up.

FIVE of them stared at one another. The sixth walked briskly to the back wall and started to climb.

"That settles it," he announced. "This is no place for a picnic."

"I'll tell th' world!"

"Not for sour apples, it ain't."

Two more moved uncertainly to follow. Massey seized the first man by the leg and dragged him down with a splash.

"Get to hell back here," he snarled. "Where d'you think you're goin'?"

The man picked himself up and eyed him truculently.

"What's it to you? I'm leavin' here—that's where I'm goin'."

"And leave the lieutenant?"

"I hope to spit in your mess kit, I'm leavin' him."

"The hell you are!" Massey stepped between him and the wall.

The others stared.

"What you tryin' to feed us?" said one.

They knew how he felt about Lieutenant Acker. They had no particular grudge against him themselves, but if the outfits on either side had retired—

"What's the idea?" they wanted to know. "Who d'you think you are anyhow? Joan of Arc or somebody?"

" 'S all right about Joan of Arc. You ain't goin' off and leave the lieutenant in a fix like this."

"Aw, he's about dead—prob'ly he is dead."

"Well, you ain't goin' jus' the same."

"Who says so?"

"I say so, and I'm commandin' this platoon."

There was an instant of startled silence. Then the air was filled with hoots and jeers.

"Commandin' hell!"

"Who says so?"

"Lechinski's commandin'. He's senior private."

Three of them turned on Lechinski, who stood dumb and bewildered.

"Ain't you senior private?"

Lechinski's slow wits were still at sea, but one of the others answered for him.

"Sure he is—he's in command. And he says to get outa here, don't you, Lechinski?"

Lechinski nodded, relieved.

"Sure, I t'ink better v—"

"Command? Him?" Massey interrupted savagely. "Say, has he ever been a corporal? Have any of you ever been corporals? Well, then!"

"What the hell difference does that make? You might have been a corporal once, but you ain't now."

Somebody laughed.

"I'll tell th' world he ain't. Come on, fellas. Give my regards to the Kaiser when you see him."

Massey crashed into the first man with his shoulder.

"You listen here! I'm in command here. You can look it up in 'Army Regulations,' but right now the guy that don't obey orders is due for a trip to Leavenworth, and what's more, he's gonna get his face knocked endways and I don't mean maybe. Anybody want to try?"

Some one said—

"Aw, y' crazy!"

But nobody moved forward. The confident reference to "Army Regulations" was having its effect.

In that instant he knew he had them.

"Look it up when you get back," he told them. "Anybody want to bet a coupla hundred francs? 'Army Regulations,' one ninety-seven—an' a half," he added for good measure.

They looked at him. They looked at each other, doubtfully. But there was the authority of a quoted number and a man does not bet good money unless he knows what he is talking about, or thinks he does. Maybe he did know. Anyway he had been a corporal once.

The argument still went on, but there was a different note in it now. They were not questioning his authority, but the feasibility of staying.

On that point he was firm.

"Nobody goes till the lieutenant does," was his ultimatum. "What kind of soldiers are you anyhow?"

"Aw, we'll carry him along."

"You heard what the pill roller said. He'd be dead before you could get him a hundred yards."

"Hell, that's his lookout. We're doin' the best we can. What you worryin' so much about him anyhow? He's no friend of yours."

"Sure. He'll prob'ly die anyhow. What's the use of us bein' killed?"

Massey grinned, hard lipped.

"What the hell d'you think you're here for?"

The shells continued to drop. The rain drizzled down. The six waited, cold, apprehensive, miserable. From time to time Massey went into the shelter to see how the lieutenant was getting on. Once as he bent over him the officer gasped:

"Heard it all. Get the men out."

Massey's eyes narrowed sullenly.

"You go to hell," he said—and felt better.

The shelling stopped as abruptly as it

had begun. In the ghastly, dripping silence some one whispered:

"The krauts are fixin' to come over. We ain't got a prayer."

"Who," Massey retorted, "detailed you to the general staff? Get over there now and help Merkle with that machine gun. Lechinski, you take the chaut-chaut. Rest of you stand by with your rifles."

They waited. Occasionally artillery thudded in the distance, and once, far to the right, a machine gun hammered.

It might have been an hour later that their ears picked up a sound, directly to the front—a stealthy squelching of feet and the click of metal on metal. Massey signed for silence and peered into the gray smother.

Then, right at hand, a dozen gray forms showed. The Germans were playing their favorite trick of working forward through the shell holes.

"Let 'em have it!"

THE CHAUT-CHAUT clattered; the machine gun ripped. Three rifles crashed. The gray forms melted away. Five seconds later a grenade plopped into the mud and burst ten feet from the position. After that there was a low moan from somewhere out in front, and then silence.

A machine gun opened on them with a sudden snarl like a vicious dog. They crouched low while the bullets flickered and spatted against the stonework.

Then a wandering breeze caught the mist and tore it to ragged streamers. Before it shut down again, Massey had a glimpse of a shell crater with the lip sandbagged and above the sandbags the dome of a German helmet.

He sloshed over to the machine gun and trained it by guess.

"Let 'em have it," he told the two who were working it.

The response was instant—a rain of bullets and potato masher grenades. The men flattened themselves against the wall. Lechinski dropped the chaut-chaut with a cry and slid down into the water.

"Pardon me," Massey remarked. "My error."

He rummaged among the bodies and collected four grenades. Two of them he put into his pockets. The other two he handed to Spider Burke, a wiry little Irishman.

"Come on," he told him.

"Where to?"

"Berlin."

Under cover of the mist, the two crawled out of the cellar and wriggled forward on knees and elbows. From time to time they stopped to listen.

Somebody coughed a few feet away. They lay rigid, breathless, and then began to crawl forward, inch by inch. Presently, straining through the blanket of fog, they made out a dark shadow that was the lip of the crater.

Massey gave the signal. They rose up together, hurled the four grenades one after another and flopped into the mud again.

Four crashing reports—screams—curses—the vicious *b-r-r-p* of a machine gun. They heaved themselves up and plunged over the edge of the crater. Before the two machine gunners could disentangle themselves from their piece Massey had smashed the head of one with his rifle butt and Burke had bayoneted the other. The grenades had done the work for the others as huddled gray forms at the bottom of the hole amply testified.

How they got that gun back to the cellar, working it inch by inch through the mud, Massey himself could hardly have told. But they did get it back and made a second trip for the potato masher grenades neatly laid out on a couple of sandbags.

He set the gun up and told off two men to work it. Then he splashed across to the shelter to see how the lieutenant was getting on. He seemed to be unconscious, but when Massey touched his wrist with experimental fingers he opened his eyes.

"Get the men out!" he gasped. "Get 'em—"

"Shut your face," was Massey's retort. "Stretchers'll be up pretty quick."

As the afternoon wore on the artillery fire began to speed up until presently it was a prolonged roar and grumble. Somewhere in the fog machine guns raved and chattered. From time to time there were bursts of rifle fire—the heavy detonation of *Minenwerfer* shells—the sharp crack of grenades.

Gray clad figures appeared through the mist and withered away under a hail from the two machine guns and the chaut-chaut. Shells churned the mud around them. Bullets out of nowhere whipped the air and ricocheted off the stone work, screaming into space. Something was happening, but what it was the five in the cellar had no way of knowing. They fired or threw grenades or flattened themselves against the walls or burrowed into any cranny that offered shelter.

And still the lieutenant lived and still they hung on.

At a little before dark the company, painfully and blasphemously retaking the ground they had lost that morning, found them there—three haggard men with a machine gun and a chaut-chaut, and a sorely wounded officer who insisted on seeing Captain McDougal before they took him to the rear and who threatened to roll off the stretcher if they tried to take him before that officer came.

"Aw, let him have his way," Massey said wearily. "He wants to report me for insubordination or something."

Clean and shaved and brushed, Massey sat at a board table with a pencil gripped in his fingers and his tongue between his teeth. He was writing to his girl. At intervals he sighed laboriously and wet the pencil. He had got as far as:

> Sweet Mamma: Well, here we are in rest billets. This is a hell of a war— .

He looked at it with his head on one side. It seemed to him that that pretty well covered everything. But you could not just end a letter that way. He would have to write something more or she would think he was a dumbbell. He frowned and glared at the paper. He clutched the pencil.

Somebody put a hand on his shoulder. He scowled up to find a welfare worker bending over him.

The welfare worker was very bald and his spectacles glittered with the enthusiasm of service. He sat down beside him, still with his hand on his shoulder.

"Writing to mother, buddy?"

"Uh-uh."

"It's a pretty good thing to do. And you'll have something to tell her now."

He smiled archly.

"Been hearing things about you," he told him. "The boys have been talking about what you did up in the line. Don't it make you feel good to think that when the test came you could forget your little personal grudges and do that for the man you hated? And I'll bet you've found out now that he isn't such a bad fellow after all. How 'bout it, buddy?"

Massey considered.

"He's all right, I guess," he said shortly.

"Of course he is. One of the best. Why, they tell me that he wouldn't let them take him away until he'd seen the captain and told him himself how fine you'd been. Now isn't it worthwhile to have saved a man like that? I tell you, buddy, when we sink our own little—"

"Say, for lan's sakes," Massey growled, "d'you think I'd have stuck around there and took a chance on bein' knocked off on his account? I was savin' him till the two of us are out of uniform. And then," he added, "I'm gonna knock the block off him."

The welfare worker stared. He got up.

"Well, I won't keep you from finishing your letter any longer, buddy," he said.

Massey planted his elbows more firmly on the table.

". . . This is a hell of a war—" he frowned and bit the pencil—"hell of a war. . ."

His fingers wandered to his left sleeve, just above the elbow. He glanced down at his arm.

A sudden comprehension lighted his face. He squared himself to his work.

"This is a hell of a war, but it's got its points," wrote Sergeant Massey.

DARKENED SEAS

By RALPH R. PERRY

CHAPTER I

WAR ZONES

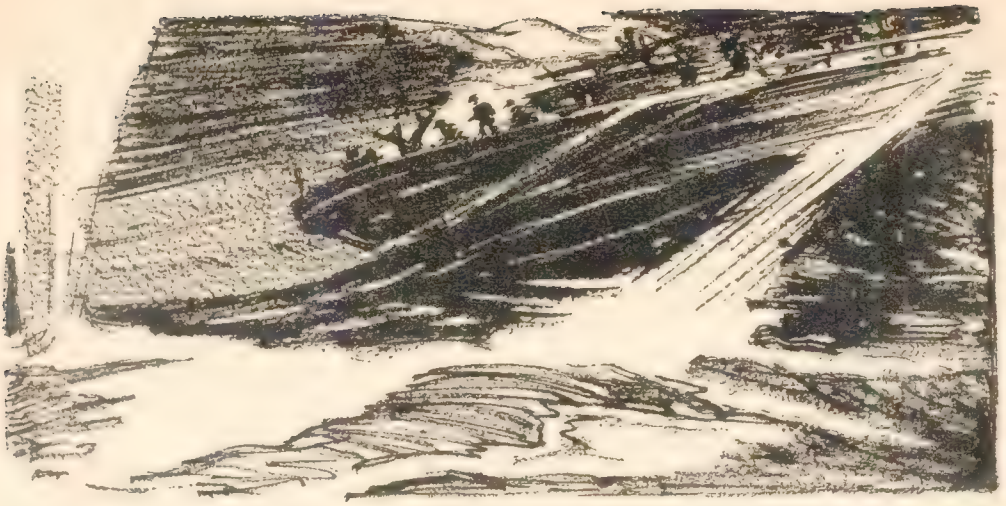
OVERSEAS—the S.C. *702* was ordered overseas! George Sherwood was sure of it, so positive that he snatched a frayed white hat off his black head and hurled it far away into the greasy harbor water. He was going to France or Italy. That hat had been worn out in training camps. He was done with it—he would get a new one to go to sea. He was going to sink a U-boat. Of course he was. Why, unless the *702* were needed abroad, should the uncompleted submarine chaser suddenly be swarming with Navy Yard workmen? More was being done to equip her for sea this morning of May 25, 1918, than had been performed during the three weeks that Coxswain Sherwood, U.S.N.R.F, had been aboard as ship tender.

Yesterday one elderly carpenter had planed long shavings of redolent yellow pine from the rail, working with utter disregard for time, to secure a perfect joint. Yesterday Sherwood had had to struggle with red tape at the storehouse of the Brooklyn Navy Yard for four hours to secure one set of signal flags.

The storekeeper had no attention to spare for him. From an S.C, was he? What kind of ship was that? Oh, yeah? One of them hundred-and-ten-foot wooden spit kids? Three gasoline engines? Queer kind of power plant for a seagoing man-o'-war. Why didn't the commanding officer sign this requisition? There ain't no commanding officer yet? Well, he's gotta sign this before you get any flags, sailor . . .

Four hours of argument, indifference and thinly veiled contempt for wooden motorboats and Naval Reservists in order to obtain two fifty-cent flags. But today—

In the chart house four mechanics were setting up the compass. Stumbling over their heels, carpenters were bolting



A Novelette of a Submarine Squadron in the Lanes of War

down the mounts for two Lewis machine guns. On the forecastle, two men on their knees with electric drills were boring holes in the deck to mount the Davis gun, and another gang of mechanics was waiting with the gun itself.

The wherry amidships was buried under a pile of stores. Mattresses for the bunks, spare oakum and cordage, Very pistols, bunting, canned goods, canvas, a package of sail needles, a hundred-and-fifty-pound anchor; iron pipe, reducers and couplings, a water closet, a package of charts, binoculars, a stop watch—and still working parties in dungarees dumped the equipment aboard.

Sherwood's fingers ached from signing receipts. From a dozen storehouses in a dozen different parts of the Navy Yard the gear was being rushed without order or system. The working parties refused to help him stow the stores; and besides, the compartments below decks rang with hammers and were crowded with workmen. Files of sailors, throwing their loads anywhere on deck, thrusting out a paper for Sherwood to sign, hurrying away—to return with similar burdens which were dumped, with the same haste and confusion, on the decks of the two chasers moored next in line, the S. C's *703* and *704*.

These three boats hummed like beehives. The remainder of the chaser fleet —there were sixteen uncompleted vessels, all told, in the basin—rocked quietly in the oily water. Their ship tenders lounged on deck, rolling cigarets and looking enviously at Sherwood. Chasers were needed somewhere at once. In the North Sea, the Adriatic, off the Irish coast or the coast of France? There the submarines were. Only there could a sailor find active service in the great war.

"I'll write you next from France, Mary Shea," Sherwood whispered to himself. "I must be going across. The Navy doesn't fall over its own feet this way unless hell's broken loose plenty and sudden!"

May 25, 1918. Since April the British had had "their backs to the wall." Through Gough's Fifth Army the gray German tide had surged to the Somme; had all but broken the British forces at Lys, had smashed through the French along the Chemins des Dames to the Aisne and then the Marne. A million anxious civilians had left Paris. General Foch had warned the premiers of England, France and Italy that unless America came to their aid immediately there was danger of an Allied defeat in the present campaign.

In France a hundred and sixty-two exhausted Allied divisions opposed two hundred German divisions, equally weary, but stimulated by overwhelming success. There was no possibility that the French or British could increase the number of their units. To keep their divisions up the fighting strength required all their reserves.

The hope of the Allies lay in the half trained troops of America, moving by every train from the cantonments to the seaports; the hope of Germany was that the war could be won before those men could be brought across three thousand miles of sea. To dam that flow of troops could insure victory; even to delay it would probably place *Deutschland über alles*.

Thus far, however, the U-boat campaign against troop ships had been a failure. In thirteen months half a million men had reached France without a single casualty. Most of the destroyers of two great navies were concentrated off the European coast. They formed a moving wall which the submarines had been unable to penetrate in the past, and which there was little prospect of piercing in the future.

The U-boat commanders had tried every trick they knew. Occasionally an empty troopship on the voyage to America had been torpedoed simply because empty boats were not as thoroughly guarded. If the number of destroyers on patrol could be reduced, those same ships might have gone down full of American soldiers. If half a dozen vessels of a convoy could be sunk—under ideal conditions one submarine might perform the feat—the morale of the American people would droop.

The headlines: TWENTY THOUSAND SOLDIERS DROWNED. A catastrophe more stunning, more awful, than a great battle. Would it not cause future convoys to be more carefully guarded? Destroyers to be ordered away from the coast of Europe? Retard, if it did not temporarily dam, the current of olive drab soldiers flowing across the seas which was certain, given time, to exhaust the German offensive and break the Hindenburg line.

On this strategy the Germans acted. Troopships do not follow fixed routes as do merchant ships. A submarine can not hope to find a convoy on the high seas. Its task is comparable to that of a blindfolded man who must catch an enemy with slightly clearer sight crossing a ten-acre field. A troopship has fifty lookouts, a submarine but one. Yet if the field has but two gates, the blindfolded man may lie in wait where his enemy must run eventually into his outspread arms. The Atlantic Ocean was the field. One gate was the ports of France and England; the other, undefended, was New York.

May, 1918. Hell had broken loose indeed. Infantry with their training half completed were hurriedly entrained; equipment was dumped helter-skelter on a subchaser's deck.

DOWN the dockside a chief yeoman whose rating badge and six enlistment stripes were of gold, waddled with haste, which was comic, for he was corpulent and resplendent as an admiral.

"Where's your skipper? Where's the crew?" this glittering personage demanded of Sherwood. "I've got to put this boat in commission in a hurry. You go to sea tonight."

"I don't know—" Sherwood hesitated. The gleam of all that gold lace was overpowering and he almost added "sir."

"Humph!" The yeoman was annoyed.

"Run a commission pennant up to the peak in stops, ready to break it out when I finish reading these orders," he ordered. "Er—humph—er—that is—"

The yeoman, who had served Uncle Sam for more than twenty-four years, seemed to recollect that he was addressing a Naval Reservist whose acquaintance with ships and seagoing lingo was presumably less than a year old. He translated:

"Find a narrow strip of red and blue bunting about four feet long. That's a commission pennant. Roll it up and tie a turn of the halyard around it, so that it will stream out in the wind when you give the halyard a jerk. That's called hoisting a flag in stops."

Sherwood decided to take this snorting mountain of gold lace and blue serge down a peg.

"I'm a graduate of the schoolship *Newport*," he answered gravely. "I studied seamanship and navigation for two years—in sail."

"Er—humph! The hell you say!" To conceal amazement the chief yeoman produced a plug of tobacco from his hip pocket and bit off a seagoing chew. "How was I going to know that, lad?" he asked, speaking now as one professional to another. "Men like you, that would be called a sailor by sailors, ain't common in the Reserve. Not rated coxswains, they ain't. If you'd been a two striper or a lieutenant junior grade, now, I might 'a' guessed."

"I never took out my mate's papers nor went to college."

"It's the rah-rah boys that get made officers, ain't it? Six week marvels outa Pelham Bay," snorted the yeoman. "I've seen that school. The day I was there a guy in gob's uniform, a seaman first class —he was nothing more than that, believe it or not—was teaching seamanship. Six weeks—and the birds taught that brand of seamanship get one stripe of gilt on their uniform, and you and me have to salute them! 'S a fact, war's hell. Not that a trick ensign ain't good enough for these trick boats."

"We're going overseas, aren't we?" Sherwood asked to change the subject, for he did not intend to listen tamely to criticisms of chasers while he was serving in one.

At once the chief yeoman became the functionary. Had he been the admiral himself instead of one of the admiral's clerks, he could have weighed his answer no more carefully.

Sherwood held his breath, waiting for judgment to be pronounced. That he was going to sea in a rank far below the one to which he was entitled by training and experience meant nothing to him. He had given up much more than rank to enlist. He was, in the fullest sense of the word, a volunteer.

When the United States declared war he had been a shopman in the locomotive repair yards of the New York Central. His wages were more than sufficient to take care of a wife; and Mary Shea had the blackest hair, the bluest eyes and the quickest smile of any girl in Harmon. The diamond was on her finger, the day named for adding the gold circlet—but that day was late in April. When it dawned Sherwood wore a sailor's blue jumper instead of a bridegroom's new coat.

Little Mary Shea understood, even if she did not wholly approve. She was brick enough to want to marry him, war or no war, whether his pay was two hundred and forty dollars a month or forty.

"No, kid. Wouldn't be square," Sherwood demurred. "I ain't going to make you call no photograph on a bureau 'husband'."

Many times before his enlistment friends pointed out that a railroad shopman was a necessary occupation, practically exempt from the draft. If he did not want to stay where he was he could go into a shipyard and pull down big money as a ship's fitter—another necessary occupation. Lots of the gang were doing that. They wrote of a hundred, a hundred and fifty, two hundred dollars every Saturday in the envelope, with wages steadily going up.

"Let them grab the gravy," Sherwood would reply. "I've learned sailoring on the *Newport*, and ain't an immigrant. Licking the Heinies is the only real job in this war, so for Pete's sake, shut up!"

On April 8, 1917, he enlisted—and for one long year he went from one training camp to the next, learning infantry drill, ashore. Every camp was so far from Harmon that he could not see Mary oftener than once a month, and when he did they went to the movies because he was broke. She wrote him fairly often but, being feminine to her finger tips, she wrote of the good parties she had and how well his old buddies were doing—those who were not in khaki or blue. Of course, she was glad he was not a slacker.

Sherwood was sick of that bunk. If the Navy would not let him fight, why he could enlist in the Army or go back to Harmon and make some money. Active service was what he wanted. He thought he was getting it at last, and he could scarcely wait.

His eagerness unsealed the chief yeoman's lips. A light that was almost fierce danced in Sherwood's brown eyes. He was a stocky, heavily muscled youngster of twenty-two. Not over five feet eight inches in height, he had built himself up by work with heavy tools until he tipped the scales at a hundred and eighty. His chest swelled with smooth, hard muscle, which stretched the spotless white cotton undershirt tight. His hair was black and cut short.

"You'll see service, lad—and that's more than I should tell you," the chief yeoman grunted. In the Navy orders are given, not explained. "Ain't that your skipper—the lanky, yellow headed ensign coming down the dock, I mean?" the yeoman added, assuming all at once his dignity. "Ensign Hartley?" he called.

"Yes, sir," the ensign answered, and saluted.

Two long strides took him to the edge of the dock. He swung one long leg over the rail and hopped on to the *702*. The top wire of the rail was fully three feet from the deck, but legs and arms made up most of Hartley's six feet three inches. He was all gaunt skin and bone; too tall to have much strength.

"What a mess!" Hartley grinned. "They told me at Pelham Bay this morning my boat was ready for sea. I'm skipper."

The yeoman snorted.

A file of eighteen seamen and one huge chief petty officer, headed by a little ensign who looked too young even to be a college graduate, were already threading their way along the dock. The sea bags of the crew had never been washed; the single gold stripe on the sleeves of the officers was a pale, shiny yellow—proof positive, if any had been needed, that none of them had been to sea.

"Line up your men on the quarter deck, Skipper," barked the chief yeoman.

Skipper Hartley looked the S. C. *702* from stem to stern.

"Quarter deck?" he murmured.

There was a narrow triangular space in the bow, with the hatch leading to the forecastle in the center. Then the Davis gun, still surrounded by workmen, five feet of deck, then the coaming of the radio quarters, raised about a foot high, next a chart house some six feet square containing the wheel, compass and engine room telegraphs. In back of this was a grating giving space enough to work the two machine guns carried port and starboard. Still farther aft, on top of the engine room skylight, were the wherry and the piles of equipment. A two-foot deck ran between the rail and the engine room skylight, which was two feet higher than the deck. Aft was the galley and black gang mess room with a ten-foot square space of deck, also heaped with gear, between them and the engine room. But nowhere was there a quarter deck; nowhere unoccupied space enough for nineteen men.

"Line them up along the rail, then," said the yeoman.

When the crew were in place he whipped out a paper.

". . . by authority of Secretary of

Navy . . . placed in commission . . ." He gabbled too fast for the words to be understood.

He stopped, nodded to Sherwood. The commission pennant streamed in the wind. The colors were run up, and following the example of the yeoman, all saluted.

HARTLEY drew a paper from his pocket and cleared his throat. His orders bore that day's date. They directed him to prepare the U.S.S.C. *702* for sea and take command of her when commissioned. The orders sounded as if the intention was to have weeks elapse between the first act and the second. As the new skipper stopped reading, the yeoman and the crew saluted.

"Now you're in commission, Skipper," barked the chief yeoman. "Sail at once for Section Base 6."

"With all this stuff on deck?"

"Humph! Stow it while you're going down the bay."

"Where is Section Base 6?"

"Gravesend Bay. East of the Narrows. Look for a flag flyin' ashore and more of these chasers anchored near the beach." The chief yeoman went waddling off to put the two other chasers into commission.

"And that will be that," said Hartley dolefully.

He appeared to have the habit of talking to himself, for he raised his voice and used a new tone when he addressed the crew.

"Just a minute, lads." He glanced at a paper giving a list of the crew. "Which of you is O'Connor—the cook?"

A red faced Irishman stepped forward.

"That's what the recruitin' office told me," he apologized. "I'm a teamster by trade."

"You've been to school?"

"A week. Learned to butcher a quarter of beef, sir," said O'Connor proudly.

"Well, get the best supper you can. Chief Machinist's Mate Alfred Scott?"

"Al Scott. Al is name enough," rumbled a voice as deep as the big pipes of an organ.

As the chief stepped out of line his shoulders seemed as broad as the ship itself. He was nearly as tall as the skipper. Forty years old, or thereabouts, Sherwood judged, with a broad square face, the forehead of which was wrinkled in horizontal lines. Good nature and a kind of elemental self-confidence were in that face. To Sherwood Al Scott looked like a mechanic, not like the wisecracking breed that were calling themselves mechanics since the declaration of war.

Scott certainly was not a wisecracker. He looked as though "yeah" and "hell, no, buddy" would be about the limit of his intellectual flights, but the square ended, hairy fingers that swung by his knees seemed to have a brain of their own.

"Can you run a Standard engine?"

Behind the skipper's back Sherwood winked, for he liked this big man. Scott caught the coxswain's eye, but he had rumbled, "Sure!" and added a tardy "sir" before he grinned in response. His mind worked slowly.

"Learn in school?"

"No—" long pause—"sir. Learned on all kinds of engines. Twenty years."

As though explanations were too tedious, Scott walked to the engine room hatch and disappeared.

"And finally," said Hartley brightly, "have any of you men ever steered a ship?"

"I have," said Sherwood.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the skipper ejaculated, as though this were too much to expect. "Take the wheel, then, Coxswain! Cast off, and we'll get underway."

The skipper had to stoop to get inside the chart house, and within there was barely height enough for him to stand erect. He inspected the telegraphs to the three gasoline engines, his lower lip caught in his teeth.

"Maybe if you've steered you've run a ship?" he asked Sherwood under his breath.

"Yes, sir."

The lanky skipper sighed with relief. He himself had never been on a ship in his life, except as a passenger, and his initiation was the task of backing the *702* out of a maze of vessels. He was hoping at that moment that the theory he had learned at Pelham Bay would work out in practise, and Sherwood knew it as well as though Hartley had told him the fact in words.

"I expect you're going to go astern on the starboard engine, aren't you?" the coxswain suggested.

"Of course," Hartley muttered.

The engine coughed, and the *702* slid back a length.

"I saw one boat back clear to the far side of the slip, sir," Sherwood suggested, turning the wheel without orders. "Then he went two-thirds ahead starboard and full astern port. Got out neat, sir."

"Surely. That's how I'm going to do the trick," said Hartley.

The maneuver was successful, and once in the open water of the East River Hartley relaxed.

"She handles nicely, doesn't she?" he remarked.

As Sherwood was about to answer, a sudden swing of the compass card made his eyes pop.

"What is it?" snapped the skipper.

"The card—swung from south, to east by north," gasped the man who was a sailor. "I thought I was going bugs. I just moved the wheel a spoke, and it swung like a merry-go-round. We can't steer by that."

"I don't know enough to fix it," said Hartley frankly.

"It was installed today and the compensating irons may be piled any old way in the binnacle," Sherwood suggested.

The skipper bent and removed an armful of iron balls and rods, called a seaman and gave orders to "carry these aft—as far as you can get them." The compass swung back to south by west and no longer performed any wild gyrations.

"It's way wrong," said Hartley, studying the chart. "Our course is south magnetic."

"We can swing ship when we get to the base."

"Oh, yes. Of course," Hartley conceded.

AT THE squadron base, however, they found there was no time to correct compasses. Hartley was called ashore for captain's conference, and returned with a fifty-pound TNT bomb in the bottom of the wherry. He gave this to the gunner's mate, instructed him in its operation, and called Sherwood into the chart room.

"We're going out with a troop convoy tonight," he said. "Take some red deck shellac and paint the glass of every port so we won't show a pinpoint of light. I think you're a careful man, Sherwood. It's important. Make a good job of it."

"I thought they used blue lights. In the war zones, that is," the coxswain answered.

"There's no blue lights to be had," Hartley replied with repressed excitement. "Our compass is no good, of course, but my orders are to keep the chaser in front of me in sight."

"That'll be easy enough. Just follow her stern light," Sherwood soothed; but instead of being relieved by this suggestion the' gaunt skipper shook his head.

"No more lights," he snapped. "The whole Atlantic is a darkened sea now. Dark at night as the English Channel. Don't you understand? There's a U-boat been sighted off the coast. It may be waiting for this convoy. That's why we were rushed out of the Navy Yard. All our destroyers are abroad. There are only an old torpedo boat left from the Spanish-American War, a bunch of patrol boats unfit for sea in heavy weather, and six chasers off the whole port."

"Say, ain't the Germans got a crust?" Sherwood snorted.

"We've no ammunition, of course, and that bomb's really too small to damage an armored submarine," chattered Hartley

rapidly. "But the Germans don't know that. They'll think we're fully equipped, and they've learned on the other side to submerge when they see a chaser. If they don't, we're to ram. Anything to drive them under water and prevent them from aiming a torpedo at the troopships. That's orders."

"Suits me," said Sherwood happily. "But that yeoman in the Navy Yard gave me the tip this boat was ordered overseas."

"We were just sent here for temporary duty."

"That's all right, then; I was worried for a second." The black headed coxswain grinned. "We'll just get some practise on this sub before we go overseas."

"They may keep some boats here, of course," said Hartley.

"Yeah, but they'll keep the worst ones, won't they? The best ships will get over, and that's going to be us! That Al Scott —he's a good man."

"Another good man," Hartley agreed.

CHAPTER II

GREEN MEN

EIGHT troopships, weird in camouflage of pink and buff and purple and green, steamed over a gray sea upon which twilight was darkening into night. They moved in a double column, with the ancient torpedo boat *Wainbridge* in the van and three submarine chasers on each flank. Of these six boats the S.C. *702* was last in column on the starboard side.

The speed of the convoy was twelve knots, which forced Al Scott to operate two engines at full speed. The engine room became stifling hot and blue with the fumes of oil, but neither the shellacked deck ports nor the hatch might be opened. The sea was choppy. The long, narrow subchaser moved with a quick, jerky roll that threatened to throw the machinists upon the engines. In the foul air Scott and two men staggered and reeled from bearing to bearing. The new engines had to be drenched with oil.

On deck Sherwood's duty was more difficult, though slightly more comfortable. Everything was unfamiliar. Even he had never kept lookout for darkened ships on a black sea.

Hartley had not been informed at headquarters of the base course of the convoy. It moved out from the coast in a direction which seemed to average east-southeast, as much as any direction could be learned from the unreliable compass. Yet the troopships zigzagged constantly, and each change of course might be permanent. For a time the skipper babbled and growled because he had been told simply to follow his leader; but soon, very soon, he lost interest. From a bloodless pallor his face became green. His gaunt body was shaken by paroxysms of seasickness.

"Go below. I'll run the ship, sir," said Sherwood, grinning in spite of himself.

To his surprise Hartley gasped a refusal. The skipper was unable to raise his head from between his knees, but he remained in the chart house.

"Mustn't quit, even if I can't do anything," he muttered stubbornly. "Must stay with the convoy, Coxswain."

"You're damn' tootin' we're going to stay with the convoy, Skipper. We'll never get sent clear across the ocean if we get lost in the Atlantic's front yard."

But bravely as he spoke, Sherwood was already lost. He had abandoned any attempt to keep a record of the courses and distances sailed; he now snapped out the light over the dizzy compass, threw open the window and leaned far over the wheel to fix his eye on the dim shape of the subchaser ahead. It was difficult enough to see, for if he came too close the *702* would no longer be in proper position to guard.

That he was watching a chaser, and not for a submarine, disturbed him. He called the bow lookout, Matthews—an undersized, freckle faced seventeen year old kid who had grinned all that afternoon while lugging armloads of gear below

decks and, to judge by the tone of his answer, was till grinning.

"Yes, sir. You're losing him, sir," Matthews answered Sherwood's hail. "I can't see the convoy at all, either."

"This is Sherwood. Can the 'sir'," growled the coxswain. "Come aft, kid. What do you find so damn' funny about that? Ain't you seasick?"

"No."

"Then you and me have got a monopoly on the supper grub." Sherwood rang for more speed on the engines. "I'll keep an eye on the chaser, but you watch for something low and small and dark on the water. That'll be a submarine, and we want to smack it. 'S 'at funny?"

"Sure," Matthews grinned. "Ain't it fun? I was going to high school and sweating over algebra a month ago. You're gaining on that chaser fast now, Sherry."

"You got cat's eyes. Use them like hell," the coxswain approved.

BLACK sea and black sky. A deck which tossed and writhed underfoot; ahead a faint blur that must be followed. A sickening whiff of hot oil, a stifled groan from the gaunt skipper. This resembled no going to sea Sherwood had ever done. This was a black, heaving nightmare that seemed eternal. Strain on mind and eye, brutal, hard work; but along with these a repressed excitement. The possibility of action existed every second.

"Psst, Captain!" rumbled Scott's deep bass voice at the chart house door. "Air in the engine room is getting too blue to see across it. Can't we open a hatch?"

"It's me," said Sherwood, but Hartley stirred feebly.

"No hatches open, Chief," he answered. "But—I'll go down in the engine room with you. Won't make you do anything I won't do."

Racked with nausea, the skipper stumbled off after the big engineer. Hartley's duty was not in the engine room. He was useless as a deck officer, but he had determination, Sherwood reflected. Not a bad guy, even if he did talk to himself. The coxswain wished that he could locate the convoy.

Carelessness aboard the troopships themselves settled that problem. In the darkness of sky and sea flared a pinpoint of light. Some smoker had struck a match, whipped it to a cigaret and extinguished it, but by contrast the tiny flame was vivid as a beacon. A searchlight could have revealed the position of the troopship little more clearly. It was at least half a mile away from the chasers, and slightly ahead.

The boat ahead of the *702* increased speed and swung to port. Sherwood was about to follow when Matthews gave a shout.

"Something dark—to starboard!"

Cursing the extinguished binnacle light that made him dependent on the lookout's eyes, Sherwood swung the wheel hard right.

"Which way now?" he shouted; and, raising his voice, bawled, "All hands—submarine."

"Right!" screamed Matthews. "More right—*left!* You've swung by—straight ahead—it's—it's gone!"

A sharp shock rocked the chaser from stem to stern. Something scraped along her side, rolling her deck almost to the water. Then the obstruction was removed, the *702* went roaring ahead at full speed.

The collision was not as heavy as Sherwood had expected. He had been braced for a smash that would splinter the entire bow. He swung the helm hard over, so that the *702* would circle and return to the same spot.

"Drop the bomb!" shouted Hartley from the engine room hatch, forgetting the *702* had gone at least fifty yards since the collision.

The explosion of fifty pounds of TNT shook the chaser slightly. Hartley snatched a Very pistol and fired the signal of a submarine attack—a green star that floated high in the air. Sherwood stopped both engines. They were,

he judged, over the spot where the collision had occurred.

Around them was darkness and silence. The *702* fell into the trough and rolled more heavily than ever. Somewhere eight troopships were steaming away under forced draught. Signs of the guard ships there were none; on the *702's* deck the gunner's mate was explaining how the Davis gun should be loaded.

"It fires both ways, see? Gimme that shell. This end goes front—"

"Do you s'pose we got her? What'd we hit?" gasped Hartley.

"Don't know. Ask the lookout."

"Something small and dark. I didn't see it good," yelped Matthews.

"There's nothing floating," said Hartley.

"Might be. I can't be sure I came back to the same place," the coxswain snapped. "We were behind the convoy when it happened. The sub can't overtake them, hardly. How the hell do you know when you've gotten a submarine, anyway?"

"Oil," said Hartley.

In that darkness barrels of oil might have been rising to the surface of the water without their being any the wiser.

Sherwood snorted.

"I might try the C-tube," he suggested.

Hartley agreed.

While ship-tender in the Navy Yard Sherwood had familiarized himself with the C-tube, the first and—subject to its definite limitations—the best of the anti-submarine listening devices. It consisted of a T made of ordinary inch and a quarter galvanized iron pipe. The stem was fifteen feet long, the cross piece about five feet fitted on each end with a rubber ear which communicated with ear pieces like those on an old fashioned phonograph. A hand wheel rotated the arms in the water, and when the sound of a propeller sounded equally loud in both ears the cross piece was at right angles to the source of the sound, the bearing of which could then be read off on a scale attached to the hand wheel. The range of a C-tube was about two miles, its bearings were correct within eight or ten degrees, and it could be raised and lowered quickly in any weather.

Its great fault Sherwood discovered instantly. A thumping chorus which would have done credit to a dozen carpenters shingling a roof half deafened him. The sounds made by the eight troopships and the six convoying vessels mingled in deep, slow thuds and quick rat-tat-tats. Swing the tube as he would, he could not shut out that chorus. He could barely distinguish individual ships.

Yet when he strained his ears he caught another cadence in that jumble of sound. A muffled beat too fast to belong to a liner, but slightly slower and more faint than the sound made by the chasers. The sound bore, as near as he could tell, to starboard. Away from the convoy.

"There's a submarine to starboard, I think, sir," he reported quietly.

"To starboard? Then full speed after the convoy," gulped Hartley.

Sherwood's jaw dropped. For a second he stood with fists clenched, staring at the dim figure of his commanding officer. Was it possible the ensign was yellow, that because the *702* had tossed away its bomb—

"But, Mr. Hartley," he began with savage vehemence.

"That's my orders," gulped the skipper. Sensing the coxswain's feelings, he added, "A submarine must be within a few hundred yards to use torpedoes effectively at night. That convoy is miles away."

"But—" said Sherwood again.

"I'm in command," snapped Hartley.

The nervous excitement which had gripped the *702* was passing, and as he spoke he bent helplessly over his bucket. The speech, therefore, lost all dignity and force. In the darkness Sherwood smiled bitterly. In command! Yes, Hartley was in command—in theory. By virtue of a sheet of typewritten paper and the shape of his hat, he could evoke all the power of Naval discipline.

Sherwood walked to the wheel and rang all three engines to full speed ahead in

order to overtake the fleeing troopships. His resentment, however, could not be smothered entirely.

"Do you mean the subchasers have got to tag around with the troopships like a Pekingese dog around a fat old lady?" he demanded harshly when he and the skipper were alone in the chart house.

"That's the convoy system."

"Then I'm glad I got the tip we were going overseas," Sherwood blazed.

"Convoying is necessary—"

But Sherwood never considered the eight troopships far ahead of the U-boat, the periscope of which the *702* had rammed and broken, rapidly approaching deep water where no U-boat might intercept them.

"So's making boilers necessary," he retorted. "I could have kept my job and my—oh, never mind."

He bent grimly over the compass. S.C. *702* should get a lot of credit for the night's work. He would tell the lads to keep their mouths shut about the skipper's seasickness, and they would all go overseas. Tomorrow, or the day after.

CHAPTER III

SQUADRON COMMANDER LE GRAND

THE OPPORTUNITY to protect the skipper came sooner than Sherwood expected. Stopping now and then to locate the convoy by means of the C-tube—and never hearing again that muffled rumble that meant a U-boat menace—the *702* pounded along all night at full speed. Hartley had received no instructions as to turning back, and he assumed that he was to accompany the convoy as far as the thousand fathom curve, which is about one hundred and twenty miles out to sea.

The assumption was an error. Dawn revealed that the other five chasers and the *Wainbridge* had turned back some time during the night. The flagship of the convoy hoisted signals to come alongside.

Hartley picked up a megaphone and stepped into sight.

"What are you doing here? The chasers were to turn back at 2 A.M!" bawled the transport captain irascibly.

"We had a submarine contact," yelled Hartley.

"Certain of that?"

"Lookout saw a dark object."

"Well, we're afloat, all eight of us," boomed the captain.

His tone as much as said, "I think your lookout got nervous and you rammed a floating log, but you're a Naval Reservist doing your best, even if you don't know much, so I shan't discourage you."

"Return to your base, Skipper!" he ended.

"Ahoy!" bellowed Hartley.

The transport captain had gone back to bed, but the officer of the deck leaned over the bridge dodger.

"Have you any idea where we are?" Hartley asked Sherwood.

When the coxswain shook his head the skipper gripped his megaphone nervously.

"My—uh—" Hartley paused. It is difficult to be either diplomatic or apologetic when you must bawl every word at the top of your lungs. "My compass is no good," he yelled. "Will you please give me my position?"

The officer disappeared long enough to work up his dead reckoning, and bawled out the latitude and longitude. Hartley wrote down the figures.

"A lot of good that does us," he whispered to Sherwood. "What's the use of setting a course if we can't steer it? The squadron commander'll say we couldn't find our way back. He's a holy terror on wheels, that boy. The crew'll think I'm a dud right."

The skinny ensign was limp as a rag from seasickness. Even Sherwood, possessed of three times his superior's strength and stamina, was half asleep where he stood and he was strongly tempted to let the ensign get out of this mess the best way he could.

"Take an azimuth of the sun," he said at last. The *702* was his ship, after all, and

he did not want her to get a black eye. "We know our position, and we can guess at the Greenwich Mean Time. I can set up the pelorus in half an hour, and we can find the compass error for this one course. After we get close in we can check our position by a chain of soundings."

"If I hit Ambrose Channel Lightship right in the nose they'll call me a navigator!" said Hartley in delight. "Help me with the azimuth and turn in. I'm still too sick to sleep."

SHERWOOD took the sight of the sun and helped the ensign work out the problem, thinking all the while how good a bunk would feel. His first disappointment of the day came when he went below and found the deck of the forecastle an inch deep in water because of the shattered plank in the bow. His bunk was sodden, and he had to go aft and share Scott's. The two big men found difficulty in staying in a two-foot bunk with the *702* rolling like a cartwheel.

The second disappointment was at Ambrose Channel Lightship. The *702* picked up the ship dead ahead, and within five minutes of the time Hartley had prophesied. By that fact the ensign obtained an enduring reputation as a navigator, but as he conned his boat into the channel he met two other chasers going to sea at full speed. From the leader semaphore flags began to flutter and Sherwood came on deck to get the news. His year in a training camp enabled him to read semaphore as fluently as any quartermaster.

"What kind of breakdown did you have?" spelled the leader.

"None," answered the quartermaster of the *702*. As Sherwood interpreted to Scott, the big machinist growled like a surly dog at the slur on his ability. "Who told us when we were to turn back?"

"Squadron commander." A pause. "Guess that was before you came to the base. I don't remember he repeated it."

"He didn't."

"He wanted you to join us," spelled the leading chaser. "We're on a sub chase. That fellow you had contact with came in and sunk a barge off the Jersey coast. Shell fire."

"We will join column as you pass." The quartermaster of the *702* whipped his flags excitedly, and Sherwood, watching Hartley's face, decided once and for all that the gaunt ensign was not yellow.

"Permission refused. Lieutenant Le Grand wants you at base. Other boats are returned to Navy Yard for better guns and listening gear."

"Well, damn his soul," said Sherwood as he spelled this message out. "What kind of a guy is this Le Grand? Say, Scottie, if we'd kept after that U-boat that barge wouldn't have been sunk."

"What kinda machinists they got, huh?" rumbled the big man. "Breakdown, huh!"

Lieutenant Alvin Le Grand, U.S.N.R.F, late manager of the Hohokus Sheet Metal Works, was waiting on the dock at Section Base Headquarters. Lean, gray headed and hollow cheeked, his naturally sallow skin flushed with choler, he nervously paced the planks.

"When did your engines break down, Mr. Hartley?" he sneered as the *702* came alongside.

Scott's head popped out of the hatch.

"Never!" he boomed.

"Silence!" snarled Le Grand. "Mr. Hartley, take away that man's liberty for two weeks for insolence. Well, sir, I'm waiting for your excuse."

"Our engines ran perfectly. We rammed a submarine and followed the convoy—"

"So you think." Le Grand's sarcasm was savage. "Why didn't you return at 2 A.M.?"

"I received no such orders."

"I gave them to you myself."

"No, sir."

Le Grand's sallow countenance grew white and red in patches.

"Do you wish a ten-day suspension from duty for insolence and neglect of orders?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. You may be thankful I consider this reprimand sufficient. Go and get gas and oil. There was a barge sunk in our district this morning, and in view of the U-boat activity a squadron of twelve chasers, of which the *702* is one, is to be placed under my command. In the future I want discipline. D'ye understand?"

Hartley's face went from white to a queer shade of yellow-green.

"I understood—that is—I thought—I was to be ordered overseas," he stammered.

"Nonsense. Our patrol is from Montauk to Barnegat. Do you understand your orders this time, sir? I trust you do. Chasers that have a machinist and no engine trouble are valuable. You'll get plenty of work," said Le Grand venomously, and stalked back into the squadron office.

Perhaps he is not to be blamed too much. That morning he had been informed that with twelve chasers he must provide convoy guards for nearly two hundred thousand soldiers a month, and also establish listening patrols and escorts along a hundred and fifty miles of seacoast. The task necessitated working ships and men to the limit, and Le Grand knew but one method—to drive. Sherwood, however, bit his lip and walked straight to Hartley, who leaned on the rail looking sicker than ever the sea had made him.

"Skipper, if we stay on this side I want a transfer," the stocky coxswain demanded.

"So do I." Hartley flung out his hands helplessly. "Maybe this will only be temporary. I don't like to stand in your way, but how can I run this boat without you? My executive officer gets seasicker than I do."

"I don't care anything about that," snapped Sherwood. "Can I put it up to the lieutenant?"

"If you think it's any use," Hartley conceded.

"Sure." Sherwood grinned. "He's bawled out so many people this morning he's tired and feeling pleased with himself. I used to have a foreman like that."

WITH eyes red with sleeplessness the coxswain walked into the squadron office and made his request. He had underestimated Le Grand's capacity for invective. The lieutenant stared significantly at his rating badge.

"What's all this mean?" he snarled. "That you were seasick last night."

"No, sir."

"Well, see here!" snapped Le Grand violently. "There's U-boats off this port, understand? You forget where you want to go, and obey orders. You're coxswain."

Sherwood only nodded, for the other's eyes had never left the crossed anchors and single red chevron on his right arm.

"The wherry you're responsible for is pig dirty," snarled the squadron commander. "Take sand and canvas and clean it. Dismissed!"

The coxswain turned on his heel and went back to the *702*. As he began to clean the wherry Al Scott poked a scowling face out of the hatch.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Be damned, well! *Mister* Le Grand wants me to spend the rest of the war manicuring a twelve-foot skiff."

"You tell him, buddy."

"Tell him?" said Sherwood. "Why should I speak my mind about that boil on the neck? Ain't he teaching me why war is hell?"

CHAPTER IV

SALTED

LATE July, 1918.

On the sea not a breath of wind stirred. The glassy surface reflected the afternoon sun in a glare that scorched, and though the ocean was smooth, it was not still. Huge swells rolled in from the horizon, and the mast of the S. C. *702* beat wide arcs against the

arching blue sky. At every roll the ship's bell clanged.

For four days the chaser had lain off Fire Island on listening patrol. Four days with no break to the monotony, four days of rolling in the trough, unable even to start the engines and make a breeze by the boat's own speed. Sherwood swore to himself and, reaching up, tied a rag around the bell clapper. Of all the duties the chaser had undertaken during the last six weeks, he had learned to dread a listening patrol the most. It was the acme of monotony, and so far it had accomplished nothing.

Six weeks of driving work at sea, however, had altered both the subchaser and her crew. The gas pipe Davis gun was replaced by a Naval three-inch rifle designed for use against aircraft, if necessary. A Y-gun which could throw three-hundred-pound TNT bombs to right and left of the ship simultaneously, was mounted on deck between the galley and the engine room hatch; two more bombs of the same kind were in position to slide over the stern.

The chart house sported a wireless telephone; there were also two new listening devices—an MB-tube and a K-tube—now sunk over the side. The K-tube buoys floated on the water in a straight line as the chaser drifted before the swells. On deck was the listening device—a portable box fourteen inches square which the listener had lugged into the scant shade of the chart house. A flag and cone flew from the *702's* yardarm to indicate she had listening devices down, and should be given a wide berth by other ships.

Even the boat was different. The weight of the new equipment and the four men added to the crew to operate them set her a foot lower in the water. She had been repainted with lampblack mixed in the standard Navy gray war paint. This, it must be confessed, was more because the subchaser skippers preferred the darker color than from any idea of camouflage, though the lampblack did render the boat slightly less conspicuous at night. A chaser looks so much like a submarine that the ships it convoys are liable to fire by mistake.

"Hear anything?" Sherwood grunted.

Nothing was in sight, but the listener—a sandy haired sailor hailing from an Iowa farm, and called after his home State—nodded in a bored fashion.

"There's a tug and a tramp steamer coming down from Boston way. About five miles off. The lookout should have sighted them both. They bear seventeen degrees on our port bow," he interpreted. Practise had made Iowa familiar with every type of propeller beat, and the electro-hydraulic ear of the K-tube made every ship within a five mile circle audible. He swung the dials. "Our relief's coming out. I hear a chaser," he reported eagerly.

"About time," said Sherwood under his breath, and glanced aside at Hartley, who sat in a chair wedged between the mast and the rail.

The tall blond skipper's face had a greenish pallor. He looked, and was, ill. Some men are poisoned by gasoline fumes, some never become accustomed to a chaser's pitch and roll. The skipper suffered from both afflictions. Seasickness had worn him to a gaunt skeleton. Six weeks' sea duty had taught the crew their jobs, and divided them into those who were seasick and those who were not. On that basis the watches had been rearranged. Hartley was crippled whenever the chaser was at sea. Keith, the executive officer, could not stand a watch in rough weather. Therefore Sherwood, who was rarely ill, stood watch with the skipper, while the boatswain's mate aided the executive. And so on down the line.

"Never a sound of a sub," Sherwood went on morosely. "Eight convoys this month, twelve days on listening duty—and nothing stirring! I'm tired of being a grain of corn in a popper. Roll around, get hot, never get anywhere."

"Going on liberty when we get to port?" Iowa drawled.

"It was my turn last time. Had twelve

hours eight days ago, and got me eight hours sleep straight. More fun than dancing with a bunch of janes I never saw before," said Sherwood sadly. "Takes twenty-four hours' leave to get to Harmon."

"They don't write twenty-four hour passes any more," sighed the ex-farmer. "But I don't sleep as long as Broadway's bein' lighted. You know the Dixie Dance Hall?"

"Yeah," said Sherwood. "And all you're going to spill about some dizzy blond, too, kid. Pipe down!"

SCOTT'S giant head and shoulders rose out of the engine room hatch. He was weary, disgruntled and smeared with oil from head to foot. He came forward to report to the skipper, but Sherwood beckoned to him.

"The auxiliary won't run and it'll take two hours to fix," Scott reported in a whisper. "The water's leaked into our quarters a foot deep, and the cook allows that if it gets any higher it'd drown the potatoes he's baking. Ham and potatoes are better'n ham and canned spaghetti, like we had last night."

"Aw, it's time we laid off O'Connor. He's cooking damned good for a livery-man," Sherwood retorted. "He gave us a good beefsteak smothered in onions the day we left port, didn't he? Ain't his fault if the hot weather melted the ice. He was planning baked chicken Sunday."

"I got canned willie an', lemme see—" The horizontal wrinkles in Scott's forehead deepened as he flogged his memory. He commenced to check off the menus on oil blackened fingers. "Goldfish, ham, an' more ham. Ain't no grub for a man my weight."

"I'll get a detail to bail the galley," Sherwood soothed.

He gave the orders in a low voice, without bothering the skipper. Accustomed to his being in command, the crew sauntered aft.

"And they call this war!" Sherwood went on in disgust. "Where's that U-boat that was off the port? Left us flat to sink coal barges off the Cape Cod Canal, and fishing boats down Virginia way. What's the matter with the Heinies? Here's where the troops are sailing from."

"Going to request transfer again?" inquired Scott with heavy sarcasm. "You should of pretended to be dumb, then they'd let you go."

"Played dumb like you did. You that bragged your engines never broke down. We've been on the go ever since."

"Ain't broke down, have they?" growled the machinist. "Quit getting frothy because you're actin' skipper. Wherever I transferred to I'd just have an engine to run, wouldn't I? What the hell? Keep the wherry clean and your shirt on."

"Don't you never get tired of a joke?" snapped the coxswain. Heat and inactivity had worn his temper. He was raising his voice when a shout from the crow's nest interrupted:

"Airplane! He's sighted something!"

Hartley sprang to his feet. The clangor of the general alarm bell filled the ship.

The past six weeks had turned the crew to veterans. No one hurried. Twenty-four men going to battle stations in cramped quarters waste time if they run, but within thirty seconds:

"No. 1 gun ready!" That was Ensign Keith at the three-inch.

"Y-gun ready!" Sherwood from amidships.

"Bombs ready! Machine guns ready."

The K-tube was hauled in. The three engines roared into life, and the *702* plunged over the swells in the direction from which the plane had come. The plane circled and headed back.

"Listener reported our relief on the way, sir!" Sherwood shouted to the chart house.

Hartley stepped to the wireless phone. He, the second ship of the division, was calling the first ship.

The reply, through the loud speaker, could be heard all over the ship, though the S. C. *703* was not yet in sight.

"Plane reports sub. Follow us, course

from Station 225° true," said Hartley.

"225° true," repeated the invisible *703*.

Sixty seconds from the time the plane had been sighted, two chasers—enough to hunt a sub—were under way.

Had the *703* been too far for the telephone, Hartley could have wirelessed the base and had a division sent out. This he would not have done until he actually made contact with the submarine, however, for all ships would hear the message and too much excitement travels up and down the coast. The listening station was fifteen miles from the convoy lanes, and the *702* had rolled in the trough four days to prevent a sub from slipping down the coast to New York from the north. The day before, a barge had been sunk off Cape Cod, and the submarine might be on its way south for bigger game.

The plane circled. The *702* stopped and put down the C-tube.

"No sound, sir!" called Iowa.

The crew stood quietly at their posts, hoping for a contact, yet not expecting one. The listener swung the tube in slow circles. In the magazine, a second listener was swinging the MB-tube, a more accurate and delicate device which would detect a submerged submarine in spite of noise made by ships on the surface. So rapidly had tactics and equipment improved since those early days just six weeks previous.

Overhead the plane made wider and wider circles until the observer must have searched four square miles of sea. Then the pilot glided to the surface and taxied up to the chaser.

"What did you see?" shouted Hartley.

"Shadow under water. Dropped two bombs, but neither exploded. It was right about here." The airman was both excited and crestfallen. "I'm sure it's the place, but—I don't see anything now."

Sherwood bit his lip to keep from smiling. Standing watch in darkened seas had taught him the tricks that overstrained eyes will play. The student pilots of the air patrol "saw" submarines daily, but no chaser had ever heard anything. Squadron 3 trusted only its electrical ears.

"If you're sure this is the place, we'll drag. Heinie may be resting doggo on the bottom. Though you should be able to see a submarine in fourteen fathoms of water with the surface of the sea like this."

"I saw something, sure enough!" the pilot insisted.

"Shadow of his own plane on the water, probably," Keith muttered, and a man aboard the *702* laughed aloud.

Hartley whirled, grim eyed.

"Keep your mouth shut, please, Mr. Keith," he reprimanded. The rebuke lost nothing in intensity because the skipper was struggling with nausea. "You might circle and look again," he shouted back at the airman.

AS THE latter took off, Hartley sent the crew below and took in his K-tube. An iron chain attached to a copper line was lowered over the stern and the *702* began to move slowly back and forth across the sea. If the chain touched iron a bell on deck would ring and the submarine, if any, be located.

Dragging was a slow, wearisome task. At least four hours would be required to cover the suspected area, and the job had scarcely begun when the *703* came alongside with the news that Hartley had been ordered to a shipyard at Hoboken for repairs—a full night's liberty at least, and possibly twenty-four hours leave for half the crew. Moreover the *703's* skipper was quite ready to continue the drag. Much better and more comfortable, he hinted, than to roll in the trough with K-tubes out.

Liberty! There was magic in the word. It put a grin on the face of every man on the *702*, and to forestall the rush Sherwood leaned close to Hartley's ear.

"Can I have a twenty-four, Skipper?" he whispered.

"If there's time," the gaunt youngster promised. "But say, Skipper," he shouted across to the chaser that had

relieved him, "don't you think you ought to be on station with tubes out to hear Heinie if he moves? I'll finish dragging."

"It's your funeral," the other skipper agreed.

The *702* resumed her task, but there were no smiles aboard her now. Sherwood stared at his superior officer in consternation.

"But there's no submarine here," he gasped.

"I don't think so, either. Iowa's the best listener aboard."

"Then why—" Sherwood began angrily.

"Orders!"

Hartley's lean jaw shut like a trap.

There is little discipline in the strict sense aboard a subchaser. Among twenty-three men thrown into such intimate daylong contact, rank means very little. An officer is followed because of what he is, not what Congress and the President have made him by a scratch of the pen. In every respect save the actual direction of the *702's* movement Sherwood was more the commander than Hartley, and both knew it.

The ensign would have liked to explain what was in his mind; that the German's chances of success in slipping through to the convoys would be immeasurably increased if the patrol force grew careless, and that the false alarms and dull, fatiguing duty of the last month bred carelessness. That, although he himself believed the airman mistaken, there was still a hundred to one chance that some trick of the sunlight might have revealed a submarine lying on the bottom, only to conceal it thereafter. Finally, what with his weak stomach, he longed for the feeling of solid earth underfoot far more than Sherwood.

The coxswain reported too quickly.

"Orders?" he repeated with an intensity of feeling which prevented his speech from being insubordinate. "The squadron's playing at war! All I want is to go where the war is. You said once you'd help me."

"Yes."

"You haven't. I still want a transfer."

"All I can give you is eighteen hours' liberty. Make the most of that," said Hartley, and clamped his jaws tight shut. Even a seasick skipper is a skipper still.

CHAPTER V

THE MOST OF OPPORTUNITY

ALTHOUGH eighteen hours' leave was not sufficient time to reach Harmon, long before the *702* had proven beyond doubt that the airplane warning was a false alarm Sherwood had laid plans for a liberty that would give him something to think about on dull days in the future. At eleven o'clock that night, when the chaser arrived at Hoboken, he and Scott walked ashore to put the scheme into execution.

First on the program came beer. Not glasses, but liters, buckets—beer enough to drown resentment and the memory of the past six days' listening duty. The motion of the chaser was in their blood. They rolled almost like drunken men as they moved, feet wide apart and held high as though they expected the solid earth to rise and meet their boot soles, like a deck.

There were many saloons, but the two sailors only glanced through the swinging doors and passed on. Wartime prohibition was in effect, and both the local and military police vigilant to prevent the sale of liquor to men in uniform. The law, however, only made the quest of beer slightly more tedious and expensive. Sherwood and Scott were in search of a second hand clothing store. They were licking their lips as they turned into the emporium of Uncle Mose Epstein "Dealer in New and Misfits—Dress Suits to Hire".

The tiny shop was crowded by half a dozen soldiers, all half intoxicated and in civilian clothes. Epstein sidled to the door and shot the bolt lest he be overwhelmed by custom.

"Joost a minute, joost a minute, gentlemen. I fix you fine. In der back

room," he pleaded. "De Army takes off der fine suits and der Navy puts dem on, hey?"

Eyes bright and black as a sparrow's darted from one drunken soldier to another, and back to the two sober sailors. Epstein's hands fluttered around his shoulders. He was a tiny little man. His bald head did not reach Sherwood's shoulders.

"Think I'm going to a masquerade, Uncle?" grumbled Scott.

"You ain't no bigger than me, white man," guffawed a burly Texan, pulling off a coat, the sleeves of which had left two inches of wrist exposed, and tossing the garment to Scott. "Cops never looked at me twice. Sho' lucky, fo' I couldn't get picked up. Not tonight." The Texan wagged his head, grinned from ear to ear and winked. Liquor made the whole world his friend. The broad hint he had given did not satisfy him. "My outfit sails tomorrow night," he whispered importantly.

"Vy you know?" challenged Epstein.

The Texan gave the little man a hostile stare.

"I know, see? No camp rumor. You meaning I lie?"

"For vy should you lie to Uncle, that gives you fine suits?" said the little man hastily. "I see none of you no more, hey? Dot is too bad."

"Our officers got a two day pass, we as ain't in any rush," drawled a broad faced farmer, Middle West by his accent.

"What outfit's that? Mine's the 269th Machine Gun, buddy," drawled the Texan. "We ain't getting more than seven hours, ending this mawnin'."

"We're the 348th Infantry," replied the farmer. "Well, you'll get the first crack at the cognac and the mademoiselles. Hell of a lot of outfits getting two days' leave."

"He goes first, but you'll be more comfortable," Epstein insinuated. "Lot of big ships waiting. *Leviathan, Northern Pacific.* Goot ships, joost in."

"The hell, and us going out tomorrow," drawled the Texan. "Is that Frog coyneeack any good?"

"Not like beer. We may beat you across even if we start three days later," remarked a third soldier. "Always sail the day following the longest leave. That's what a sergeant at the camp told me. Sure is a power of men waiting. Clerk at headquarters said there was sixty thousand, here and Yaphank and Merritt and all."

"Hey, shake yourselves out of them pants. It's getting near closing time," Sherwood interrupted. "We better get plenty of beer while the getting's good," he whispered. He nudged Scott, and the big machinist bent his head. "Hear all that? Convoy tomorrow; and another, a big one, the day after. No liberty for us next week."

"Wish they always tell us instead of being so damn' secret," Scott grumbled. "Damn' glad to find out. Gives me a chance to tune up the engines. What's the odds who knows when a convoy sails? Anybody can sit in the Narrows with a spy glass and count the ships as they leave the harbor."

"Too late to tip off a sub by that time," the stocky coxswain answered. He was suddenly thoughtful. "Don't you be spilling any gabs, Al. Nobody can take a spy glass and see what goes on at sea. Courses and tactics and all."

"Who's talking? I don't want to think of a boat or an engine again," growled the unimaginative machinist. "I got to take that air compressor apart tomorrow. It's always busting and putting the whole ship out of whack—"

A jab from Sherwood's elbow cut the complaint short. Epstein had paused, a pair of shoes in his hand. His partially bald head was cocked on one side, as though he were trying to follow the conversation of the sailors through the louder comments of the soldiers, who were now almost dressed. Probably he was all right. Probably the soldiers were repeating utterly unreliable camp rumors, but Sherwood's brown eyes began to shine happily. All work and no fun is hard on a sailor.

"From der subchasers, eh?" said

Epstein ingratiatingly, eyeing the ribbon on Sherwood's hat. "Not often do dey come here. Sailors from der transports—" The little man stopped and shrugged high as his ears to indicate how common seamen from the troopships were in his shop. "Dey must be good boats, der chasers, to need so few repairs?"

"Punk. Engines out of commission half the time they're at sea," Scott grumbled. "Most of them machinists learned their trade by drivin' a taxi."

"You know der town? Where der beer is good? It is so close to closing time it would be a pity to stop, joost with one bum seidel."

Sherwood kept his face blank, though his wits were racing.

"Got any suggestions?"

"A liddle place—no license, but good beer," Epstein urged. "Down der street two blocks. Turn to der left. I tell you, my nephew shall take you dere. The vay is hard to egzplain to a stranger."

"Don't want to go to no hole-in-the-wall dump," grumbled Scott.

Sherwood, however, nodded eagerly at the beady eyed little clothing dealer. The two sailors gave him two dollars each as rent for the suits, leaving their uniforms as security. Their return was insured by the fact that without uniforms they would be picked up by the police as deserters.

EPSTEIN'S nephew was a thin, ratty, fourteen year old kid. For ten minutes he led the two sailors through a maze of streets, but Sherwood, already suspicious, received the impression they were traveling in a circle. He judged that Epstein wished to telephone the speakeasy that they were coming.

All right. Suppose, for the fun of the thing, that the clothing dealer was a member of the German Secret Service whose occupation enabled him to obtain accurate advance information on convoy sailings. Granting that, however, the coxswain could not understand why the spy should pay so much attention to two subchaser men. To provide a guide to a lonely speakeasy was crude work. Was Epstein stupid? Or did the two sailors possess information so important that a spy would be willing to take a foolish risk to obtain it?

A convoy was sailing tomorrow. A second on the following day. What made information about the Naval guard so vital? Time? Was an attack planned against a particular ship or ships, as had been done earlier in the war when the U-boats sank the cruiser carrying Lord Kitchener?

"Are we hikin' or drinkin' tonight?" growled Scott.

"Shut up! We're hunting spies."

"Spies, hell! More rumors," retorted the machinist aloud, and went plodding stolidly along, broad shoulders hunched around his ears. He would be a good buddy in a fight, but no help at all in a battle of wits.

The "nephew" turned into a pitch dark alley, knocked at an unlighted door, and entered with the sailors instead of turning back as a guide should have done.

"Hello, kid. Who's your friends?" hailed the bartender.

"Coupla sailors. Epstein sent 'em. They're wise guys," answered the boy, with an emphasis on the last words which Sherwood did not like.

Instantly the kid slipped out of the door; and without a word the bartender filled two seidels.

The beer was good—and the strongest Sherwood had ever tasted. Ice cold in his throat, it warmed his stomach almost like whisky. The entrance, the identification, the seidels on the bar resembled a scene in a play which many rehearsals had made swift and smooth. Sherwood studied the bartender, turned casually to size up the other two occupants of the tiny room, who sat at a table near the door where they could block an exit.

All three were Germans. Huge, fleshy men between forty and fifty years old. Blond hair clipped close to their pink scalps; round blue eyes. The bartender's

wrist was tattooed. He, at least, had been a sailor once.

"That's what I call beer," Scott approved.

"Goes good after being at sea. Been out long?" suggested the bartender.

"Six days."

Sherwood stepped on his buddy's toe.

"Keep on your own feet," growled Scott.

THE BARTENDER refilled the glasses—too swiftly.

"My son is on a transport," he remarked. "He says why a U-boat don't sink one, he don't know. When the ships change formation—"

The bartender paused, and Sherwood held his breath. Surely this halted statement was intended to bait Sherwood into saying something. The change of formation from line to column, into line abreast, to which the bartender referred, was a critical moment, since the rearmost ships of the line moved diagonally ahead over water unpatrolled by the chasers. The maneuver always took place far at sea. A sailor might guess that it had to be performed some time, or know that it took place close to the coast if spies ashore who saw how the convoy left port compared notes with some U-boat commander who sighted the vessels at sea. If the time of sailing were known, as Sherwood guessed it was, the speed of the convoy known, as it undoubtedly was, the knowledge of the base course and the time the maneuver was executed would enable a U-boat to sneak to the proper position and rise from the bottom into the midst of the troopships.

"Yeah, I know. At sunset." Scott nodded.

Sherwood could have killed the machinist's mate. Any one with an almanac could learn the time of sunset.

"Sure," agreed the bartender. "The ships are steaming along on a course of 115°, not counting zigzags—"

"We've had enough beer. Come on, Scottie," snapped Sherwood.

The actual base course of the convoys was not exactly 115°, but the guess was much too accurate.

"Have a drink on the house," said the bartender instantly.

He was reaching for the glasses when one of the men behind Sherwood's back rapped sharply upon the table. The bartender walked over to take the order. The three exchanged a word or two in a whisper.

"Al, you fathead, you've talked too much," whispered Sherwood. "We've gotta take these guys. They're spies."

"Aw, you're full of red ants," snorted the machinist. "They're good guys, and good beer."

Without wasting another precious second in argument, the coxswain puffed his cigaret into a glow. He and Scott were in civilian clothes. If they were bumped off, the cops would think they had been trying to desert. If they were merely held prisoners and released, the same. No intelligence officer would believe a yarn of spies, told by a deserter.

The bartender returned, but in contrast to his previous speed he was fully thirty seconds in refilling the glasses, and held both well behind the bar out of Sherwood's sight.

"These are on the house," growled the bartender.

As he passed the heavy seidel to the sailors his right hand disappeared and gripped something below the bar. The two men at the door rose.

As though by accident Sherwood flipped the ashes of his cigaret into Scott's beer. The machinist stiffened, the glass half to his lips.

"What the hell!" he growled.

"More'n one kind of knockout in this," snapped Sherwood grimly.

A sidewise sweep of his left arm caught up his own seidel, swung glass, beer and all like a mallet against the bartender's pink scalp. He reeled and crumpled to the floor like a wet sack.

"Take 'em, Al," grunted Sherwood; and, turning, hurled his empty glass at the two big men who were plunging across the room.

The missile missed the skull at which it was aimed. Sherwood's straight left glanced from the German's bowed head, failing to stop the rush. Butted rather than struck, Sherwood was thrown backward against the bar. Fat hands caught his throat, a fat knee kicked at his groin. He felt his senses slipping. He struck short arm blows at the head pressed against his chest. Scott and the other German were swapping punches in the center of the room, but Sherwood was being bent across the bar.

He could not squirm aside. Though his back muscles were about to crack, he could not resist the weight of his enemy. Inch by inch he bent. And he had nothing to hit but the back of a fat neck. Three times his right fist struck the vulnerable spot where neck joins skull. The German slumped forward, unconscious. Sherwood threw the limp bulk backward, then staggered to help Scott.

In the center of the floor, Al was swinging with both hands. Blood streamed from his nose, but his enemy, both eyes closed, was reeling. The tottering German grabbed for a chair. Scott stepped in. His right flashed upward from the hip. That terrific uppercut lifted the big German from the floor and landed him on the table. The table collapsed beneath the shock and the German lay motionless on the wreckage.

"You dirty son of a gun!" Scott panted; he whirled to help Sherwood, and grinned when he saw the coxswain on his feet.

"If we'd had two more, we might 'a' had a fight," he announced. "But for cripe's sake, why slough a guy that's givin' you a free drink? What's it all about?"

"Don't you get it yet? Spies—"

Before Sherwood could explain there was a knock at the door. A soft, secretive *rat-tat rat-tat-tat*, audible only because of the silence which followed the uproar of the fight and the crash of the broken table.

CHAPTER VI

BRASSBOUND STUFF

SHERWOOD flung the door wide open. There stood Epstein. Sherwood reached out and jerked him into the barroom by the scruff of the neck, kicked his feet from under him and dropped heavily upon his chest.

"Shut the door and put out the light, Al. Here's the brains of the outfit," the coxswain ordered quietly.

"Vat you do?" the clothing dealer squeaked.

Sherwood made no answer until the room was plunged in darkness. Epstein squirmed and began to pant in terror.

"Pass me a bottle, Al."

Sherwood waited until the struggles ceased, until the thin body under his knees began to tremble, then suddenly knocked the bottom out of the bottle and placed the jagged end against Epstein's throat.

"Where do you forward your dope?" Sherwood growled.

"I—I don't know!"

The answer came in a whine, but the coxswain pressed until the jagged points of glass broke the skin.

"*Lieber Gott*, I don't know! Mister—"

"Come clean!" Sherwood applied extra pressure, though only a very little. He did not want to cut the skinny throat.

"Mister, I put der ad in der *Jersey Sun*. Joost an ad for a maid. Vill you take dot glass away. I can feel der blood—" the little man's voice ended with a whine, and Sherwood could not help pitying him.

"When you've told me what code you use, and proved it," he said sternly. "Remember, a detention camp is comfortable, but when I start sawing across your windpipe—"

"It is der address," Epstein gabbled. "The first two figures are der page number, der third der line number."

"Of what book?" growled the coxswain, thoroughly bewildered.

"Der suburban telephone directory. Dere is one of mine ads, here, behind the bar. I will read it."

"Lights," said Sherwood grimly.

Still sitting on Epstein's shoulders, he had Scott bring a newspaper and the telephone directory from behind the bar. Epstein indicated an advertisement:

> WANTED MAID of all work; ten in family; 614 W. 137th St. 6th floor, Apt. 12. Audubon 8472.

"Sixty-first page, fourth line," said Sherwood, turning the leaves. "Say, what column, guy?" he added threatening.

"Der outside, and der last two figures, always. You will send me to der camp—not kill me?" groaned the little man. "Der date, der number of ships, der speed. Dot's all."

The jagged glass points suddenly jammed against Epstein's throat.

"What do you put in the telephone number for, then?" Sherwood pursued.

"Der course," groaned the little man faintly.

The telephone number on the sixty-first page, fourth line, was Hempstead 723.

"There was a convoy on the 23rd," ejaculated Sherwood. "Lemme see. Eight ships, and nine knots, wasn't it, Al?"

"Don't remember. Hadn't we better be getting out of here?" rumbled the machinist. "One of these bimbos is coming to. It's the guy I hit, too." Scott's pride was injured.

"Boot him in the ear, then," snapped the coxswain, decoding swiftly.

"Page 13, line 7. Last two figures 08. Eight ships. Correct. Page 61, line 2—09. Nine knots. Correct," he muttered aloud as he turned the pages.

Sherwood felt a chill along his spine. What if they had the course right? But page 84, line 7, gave 11; line 2, 05. The nearest the spies had come to the course, then, was 115°.

The jagged bottle was tossed into the corner. Catching Epstein by the neck, Sherwood dragged the little man to his feet and started out of the door of the saloon on the run, followed by Scott. Hailing the first taxi, the coxswain told the driver to go to the officer of Naval Intelligence, and to ask a policeman where that was if he did not know. At this Scott demurred.

"What'll they do to us for being in cits?" he demanded.

"Put us in jail, for all I care. I enlisted to do something like this," Sherwood retorted.

The sight of two big men in ill fitting clothes, dragging a third man from a cab and forcing up to the sentry with the whisper of "German spy," got the two sailors immediate attention, even at half past one in the morning. A sentry conducted them down long dark corridors into a dark office, in one corner of which a droplight burned. Here a tall officer, stripped to his undershirt because of the heat, was bent over a desk piled with lead bound code books and papers.

THE OFFICER looked tired and irritated. He needed a shave, but at the first glance Sherwood liked him. He appeared to be a man who knew his own mind and was accustomed to leading men.

"What is it, sentry? I'm too damn' busy to listen to more half cocked spy stories from civilians," he rapped out.

"We're sailors from the S. C. *702*, sir," said Sherwood.

"Oh!" said the officer.

He leaned back and lighted a cigaret, studying the three men. Not a detail escaped him. His dark eyes lingered gravely upon the finger marks on Sherwood's throat, Scott's barked knuckles, Epstein's pallor and shaking knees.

"I'm Lieutenant Oglethorpe," he went on, addressing Sherwood. "I hope you've found something important. There's been too many false alarms."

"Yes, sir. I understand what you mean," said Sherwood, who recognized a war boredom like his own.

Quickly he related the scene in the clothing store and, to his chagrin, Oglethorpe nodded and yawned.

"So this is Epstein, eh?" he remarked. "We knew about him. Practically im-

possible to keep soldiers from talking. We let him operate in the hope of finding out where he forwarded his information."

Sherwood thrust forward the newspaper.

"Ah, my old problem!" The officer grinned. "Just a minute, sailor." He walked to a file and returned with a paper on which a dozen want ads were pasted. "Families of ten," he explained, "don't advertise in that curt style if they really want to get a maid. That fact attracted our attention, so we checked up the addresses and found them false. But a ratty faced little kid filed those want ads, not this man here. We were never able to shadow the kid home, either."

"Maybe you know what the message means," said Sherwood glumly.

"Do you?" snapped Oglethorpe. "I'm an expert on code, but without the title of the book being used translation is impossible."

"The suburban telephone directory. The ad says a nine ship convoy went out at eight knots on the 23rd."

Like a flash Oglethorpe reached for his telephone and barked a number.

"City editor, *Jersey Sun*," he snapped, when the connection was made. "Has your first edition been mailed? It has? Oh, hell, man, why are you so quick? No—never mind. This is Oglethorpe of the Intelligence."

He flung about to face Sherwood.

"Another of these 'family of ten' ads was filed this evening. Let's see what it means." With a speed that made the coxswain gasp the officer decoded—30—52—12.

"Fifty-two ships? That can't be right!" gasped Sherwood.

"Take the prisoner out," snapped, Oglethorpe to the sentry. "It is, though," he added when the three sailors were alone. "The 30th is day after tomorrow. The whole thing's right. You've stumbled on to the solution of a problem that baffled the Secret Service for months!"

"Putting a bottle at Epstein's throat helped."

"Irregular methods often do." Oglethorpe's fingers were drumming excitedly on the desk. "Look here," he said suddenly. "You done so much I'm going to show you more. You've earned it. Secret Service is largely a matter of intercepting communications. Tonight some amateur operator in Rhode Island broadcast a code message. The message was telephoned here, and I was pulled out of bed. The message is in the German naval code in use when the U-513, which is now off Cape Cod, left Kiel.* It says: 'New York Thursday morn.' They made the message short to prevent us from locating the wireless station, and succeeded. Now, friend Epstein had another of his ads in day before yesterday. Let's see."

Again Oglethorpe decoded, and leaned back in his seat with a long whistle of dismay.

"A ten-ship convoy, twelve knots, the 29th—which is Thursday, and correct. Though I certainly should not tell you, that convoy will carry an important diplomatic mission back to France."

"You mean the Germans will attack?"

"We-ell, who can tell?" said Oglethorpe frankly. "The next two days will present the best opportunity for a blow at American morale they've ever had. Worth sacrificing a U-boat." Oglethorpe's fingers drummed the desk top. "But which will they attack? Politicians or soldiers? The figurehead or the real thing? And how are Epstein's messages relayed to the submarine? I'll swear the wireless hasn't been used. Probably the Germans suspect we've succeeded in cracking their codes."

"The *Jersey Sun* doesn't circulate in New York," suggested Sherwood. "The suburban directory isn't circulated widely, either."

"Yes, but both are in use all the way from Barnegat to Fire Island. Newspapers are mailed everywhere, for that matter. Well, I'll wake up the admiral, I guess, and pass that problem along to the high command. I'm obliged to you boys.

*By sending divers to recover the code books from sunken U-boats the Allies learned the secret German naval codes almost as fast as these could be altered.—AUTHOR'S NOTE.

You've done a mighty important piece of work. I wish you could get credit for it, but—that's the way Intelligence works. Don't say a word. Not even to your shipmates."

"Can't I tell them there's a sub coming, sir?" cried Sherwood. "That will put them on their toes. I never knew there was an outfit like this backing us up, sir. I came in here expecting to be thrown into the brig for being out of uniform. No gold-striper ever listened to what I had to say before, sir. We've been rolling around off shore till we began to think there wasn't any such thing as a submarine, and if we know—"

"But we don't know, lad," said Oglethorpe sharply. "We think the Germans are going to make an attack, but there hasn't been a day in the last six weeks when that hasn't been a possibility. We have to put our faith in a system of convoy guards, and a personnel who are on their toes all the time. If this office said there was going to be an attack, and there wasn't, you out at sea would lose confidence in us. You'd only keep your best lookout when we cried 'wolf.' You know what happened to the boy who cried wolf too often."

"Yes, but what's the good of a guard when a sub rises in the center of a fifty ship convoy? They'd torpedo half a dozen before we could get in from the flanks."

"Sometimes the U. S. Navy has got to trust in its luck," said Oglethorpe grimly. "You forget that possibility, lad. There'll be a general order out tomorrow that all suspicious messages are to be relayed by wireless. You two will know they come here, and that we can read them, but keep your mouths shut. Your boat'll be rushed out of the yard and to sea. I wish I was going with you the next two days. And that's all, lad. Don't try to do the admiral's job for him. He might not like it. You obey orders."

"Take some sand and clean my wherry, huh?" grunted Sherwood.

The officer threw back his head and laughed aloud.

"Has somebody worked out on you?" He chuckled when he caught his breath. "Sure, clean the wherry. Do you expect to scare a spy into giving you the key of a code every day?"

CHAPTER VII

HEAVY WEATHER

ON THURSDAY afternoon a modern destroyer headed the convoy. There were ten troopships, exactly as the spies had prophesied, and as the long column left port Sherwood and Scott were keyed to a feverish pitch. The remainder of the crew caught the infection of their eagerness. Though they did not say they expected a submarine attack, at least their attitude implied that one might be made. Better lookout was never kept, even though the weather on that afternoon was on the side of the Allies.

A strong easterly gale was blowing. Even before sunset mist and thin stinging rain blurred the outlines of the ships at a thousand yards. The night convoy would be blind, desperate work, and whether the subchasers would be able to maintain their position on the flanks of the convoy until the dark hours was dubious.

The 110-footers were designed to weather a moderate gale. This storm was more powerful. Its weight forced the yachts and scout patrol to run for shelter within an hour. The subchasers plunged on, like terriers plunging through deep snow.

Long gray seas, bearded with white, swept down upon them, twenty feet from trough to crest. As the *702* dropped into the hollows Sherwood could no longer feel the wind, could see nothing but water and foam looming up far above his head. The masts of the two chasers ahead, even the masts of the troopships, were hidden by the crests of the seas.

Then a dash of spray as the *702* put her high bow into the advancing mountain, a lurch and a struggle up the wave slope.

With forty feet of keel in the air the subchaser would balance on the wave crest. A glimpse of the convoy—wind that howled in Sherwood's ears—a plunge down the steep slope of gray water into the trough—and the whole cycle was repeated again. The seas became a giant roller coaster on which the *702* lurched and tumbled, up and down again every sixty seconds without rest or respite.

"Sub—couldn't stay submerged. Waves would toss it into sight," howled Scott, who had come topside to learn how the coxswain was making out.

Hartley had given up the struggle and was in his bunk. Keith, the executive officer, was little better, for the wrenching, diving chaser was going through antics that were too much even for men who had never been sick before. The quartermaster was doubled up on the chart room floor, and of the deckhands only Garfoyle and grinning little Matthews were fit for duty. The spray had extinguished O'Connor's kitchen fire. By holding on to his table with one hand, the cook had managed to open cans of salmon. There were goldfish and hardtack for those who could eat them. No coffee. Even the drinking water was foul with rust churned from the bottoms of the tanks.

"We can't—shoot a gun—hardly drop a depth charge, either."

"They—might try," Sherwood answered without turning, for he was wedged in the space between the chart house engine telegraphs.

Matthews gave a shout of alarm, half drowned in the scream of the wind as the chaser rose on the crest. Reeling out of the door, Hartley looked first to windward and, seeing no periscope, upward. Matthew's face was chalk white.

"I think the mast's going to fall," he shouted.

A mast guy had parted under the strain, and the pole was swaying.

"Come down!" snapped Sherwood.

He ran for a rope and, aided by Scott, guyed the mast as well as possible, but it still swayed as though it might go over the side at any moment.

"We can't turn back," Sherwood said. "You'll have to help lookout from the top of the chart house, Matt. That mast won't hold you."

"I'll say it won't!" grinned the kid.

He climbed up and clung to the low wire railing which circled the chart house. He staggered on the slippery canvas as the chaser dipped and rolled.

"Keep a bright lookout," said Sherwood grimly, gazing himself at the transports, shrouded in spray and beginning to steam faster than the chasers. "We'll need full speed to keep up, Al. Be damned to this gale!"

Darkness was falling. Sherwood would lose the convoy unless he got very close to one of those ships before nightfall. He wanted them to see him close in; otherwise, in the dusk they might mistake him for a submarine and open fire.

The added speed made the chaser buck more violently. Hartley had his head in his arms. Sherwood was dividing his attention between the compass and the convoy when the *702* gave a violent lurch. On the deck just over the coxswain's head Matthews scrambled to keep his footing. His boots pounded a tattoo on the thin planks, and were gone; his body appeared in mid air, and then, to Sherwood's amazement, the body of the lookout plunged downward just outside the chart house windows.

From the roof of the chart house to the deck was a fall of ten feet. For an instant Sherwood was relieved when Matthews struck upon the wires of the deck rail, which eased the shock. But only for an instant—only for the one awful second that Matthews balanced, lying across the wire, body rigid with terror. The passing wave shook the subchaser. Matthews slid over the rail into the sea. Rubber boots and oilskins took him under.

Sherwood jerked loose the man overboard pennant, a useless signal since the *702* was lost in column; he threw the rudder hard down. The *702* made a circle to the spot where Matthews had disappeared. One minute, two minutes,

three minutes they waited. Hartley was on deck, Keith, everybody. Nothing but gray sea and foam. Matthews never rose.

"Gone!" Hartley croaked.

Numbed by the tragedy, he might have stared at the sea all night. It was Sherwood who stepped to the wheel and rang for full speed. There were two thoughts in the coxswain's brain. Grinning little Matthews, to whom war had been a game, who came to sea lest he have to study algebra . . . Dusk was the best time for a submarine attack. The *702* could not lose position now.

"Take lookout atop the chart house, Garfoyle," Sherwood said. "Keep bright lookout, and for heaven's sake, hold on!"

Bitterly the coxswain drove the chaser through the wet, rolling twilight; managed to force the chaser alongside the rearmost troopship. The bulk of the liner loomed dark on his port beam. Before he was in the proper convoying position there was no more light anywhere save the faint blue glow from the binnacle.

He called the lookout to the wheel, climbed himself on the chart house roof and buttoned his oilskin coat around the mast. The steel steps leading to the crow's nest bruised his side, yet he endured the pain grimly. Of the *702's* deck force, but four were left who were fit for duty. Three would have to divide the steering, which was heavy labor in such a sea. Sherwood must combine the duties of lookout and commander. For him there was no relief. The time was eight o'clock; the chasers were to accompany the transports until two.

On ordinary nights position was not difficult to keep. Now spray blinded Sherwood, and the heavy seas made the chaser almost unmanageable. The zigzagging of the convoy was a continual threat of collision. Again and again her dark bulk charged upon him.

"Right rudder!" he shouted through the voice tube to the helmsman below.

The chaser would lurch off on a course roughly parallel to that of the ship. Of the exact change of course Sherwood had no conception. He had to judge his distance in the dark. To swing too far to the right was to lose the convoy; not far enough, to crush his frail ship against her iron sides. No sooner had he settled on a course, than the transport would veer again. The time might be fifteen minutes, or three. He never knew. Her bulk would merge into the darkness of sea and storm.

"Left rudder!"

Hunt her in the smother of wind and spray, hunt her with eyes blinking from the lash of rain.

"Is it two o'clock yet?" he whispered through the voice tube.

"Five bells, Sherry!"

Only half past ten. Keep alongside the transport. She's zigzagging— No, eyes are playing you tricks. Sub could only find us by luck. I could work the Y-gun alone. That's a zigzag—but no sub will attack now. Matthews might have stayed in his bunk, poor kid. Why can't a sailor *do* something?

A PLUNGING hull under his feet, in the darkness to starboard that alternately charged and tried to elude him. The watch changed, but Sherwood did not know. He had been conning the chaser forever. The shout of "four bells" from the chart room was a surprise. He turned the chaser at right angles and sailed for a mile until he was well clear of the troopships. There he flashed on the running lights for a moment, and scanned the dark seas for a sign of other chasers. There were none. Either the weather was too thick, or the remainder of the squadron had dropped behind because of engine trouble. And—nothing had happened. Death and effort, both useless.

Off came Sherwood's sou'wester. The cold rain matting his dark hair and trickling over his neck revived him. Though ten ships were steaming safe to sea, his work was but half done. When the *702* pointed her bow west the waves hurled her along, yawning wildly. Sher-

wood unbuttoned his coat and climbed stiffly to the deck to help with the steering.

Into the chart house reeled O'Connor.

"What do ye say to some java? And oatmeal, hot? Hot chow would be puttin' new insides in us, and besides, 'tis no use tryin' to slape. Three times I've been throwed from the bunk, and the deck's leakin' salt water like a pump."

Indeed the sight of sparks sucked out of the galley smoke stack by the wind heartened all four of the tired seamen. The two off duty went to the galley, from whence fifteen minutes later, arose a yell. The pot of coffee and the oatmeal had been tossed over the six-inch rail that surrounded the stove.

O'Connor worked his way forward.

"Bedad, can ye bate the luck?" he demanded. "But 'tis coffee ye'll have, or there's no fight in the Irish. I've filled every pot with water and wedged them tight on the top of the stove, the coffee and oatmeal amongst 'em. There's boiling water flying like drops from a dog's tail, but 'tis a suit of oilskins I'll put on when the coffee's done."

Five minutes later it seemed to Sherwood that he could smell the coffee's aroma. A big sea flung the *702* sidewise. From the galley resounded a crash and clatter of tinware. Steam burst out of the hatchway, Followed by O'Connor, wearing oilskins. With a wild Irish yell the cook ran to the chart room, snatched a fire extinguisher and raced aft. Swearing at the top of his lungs, he pumped the extinguisher into the galley.

"What's the matter?" shouted Sherwood.

The cook turned a face crimson with rage.

"The java was boiling when the stove broke loose from the bulkhead," he screamed. "Oatmeal and coffee and boiling water runnin' all over the galley floor, and red hot coals spillin' over all! But, bedad, I'll try the heatin' stove in the focsle. When Terry O'Connor promises ye hot food, he's the boy that delivers, and no applesauce, either!"

Sherwood pointed to the forward deck. O'Connor looked, and gave a sigh like a punctured balloon. Waves had carried away the smoke pipe of the focsle stove, and water running down the deck was trickling steadily into the hole.

"Will ye have goldfish or canned willie?" O'Connor sighed. "Be quick now, Coxswain, before one of these damn' seas washes me can opener overboard."

"We'll be in port by dinner time," Sherwood replied.

Dawn was breaking grayly, and the coming of light seemed to reduce his fatigue. The strain of keeping lookout in the dark seas had been the greatest burden.

"Beefsteak smothered in onions, if I can borry a stove," O'Connor promised. "Then we'll slape. There's not a bunk that ain't full of water."

"I could sleep in a brook," Sherwood replied.

He took a slab of corned beef and a cup of rusty water, found them good and managed to grin. The violent plunges of the chaser bothered him less and less. He was conscious, however, that all his movements and mental processes were slow. He stared at Ambrose Channel Lightship for ten seconds before he realized the vessel represented port, sleep and rest. He saw a chaser lying at the entrance of Ambrose Channel itself without wondering why a boat which had also done convoy duty did not proceed into the harbor.

Mechanically he stopped the *702* alongside. The skipper of the other chaser slipped from the chart house. Unshaven stubble covered his chin; his eyes were red from sleeplessness; for uniform he wore a gob's black sweater and oilskin hat.

"How about giving me some breakfast?" he shouted. "Our galley stove came adrift!"

"So did mine," mourned the skipper. He paused. "I've orders for you. Go to Barnegat and listen. The *702* was mentioned by number in the admiral's orders. Le Grand picked us."

"From headquarters?" yelled Sher-

wood. Weary as he was he felt a thrill of excitement. This order must be Oglethorpe's doing.

"Yeah, and that ain't all!" the other skipper howled through the megaphone. "There's another order, from Washington *via* our squadron commander. He had it sent out here today."

"What?"

The skipper shook his fist at the air.

"Some swivel chair patriot has gotten an order out that chasers aren't doing sea duty," howled the wrathful skipper. "We've got to cut the stars off our uniforms. Cut—off—the—stars! And I've been sleeping in more salt water than those headquarter birds ever saw! Well, can't you even cuss?"

"Aw, what's the odds?" yelled Sherwood. He was thinking of the first special order, but the skipper tapped his forehead and flung up his hands.

"I hope the sea off Barnegat rolls some brains back into your bean!" he bellowed.

The two chasers separated, the *702* standing toward the south.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTACT

TO HAVE assigned listening duty to one of the seamen would have required only an order from Sherwood. He resisted the temptation. From eight o'clock in the morning, when the *702* arrived on station, till two o'clock in the afternoon he sat wedged in the corner of the chart house with the tubes of the K-tube plugged in his ears.

Ships passed infrequently. The sounds of a submarine were absent, and the rolling beyond everything Sherwood had experienced. The ship's bell tolled, which was fortunate in that the noise kept the coxswain from falling into the sleep of exhaustion. He sat in a dull stupor; at first he attributed a faint hissing sound in the K-tube to the effects of fatigue or heavy weather. Assuredly the noise was not from a propeller.

Pss-pss-psst — psst-psst-pss — pss-psst-psst-pss —

And suddenly Sherwood was wide awake. With a yell that echoed through the boat he tore the plugs from his ears and dived into the radio shack. His fists hammered the sleeping operator awake; he caught the man on duty by the arm and dragged him toward the deck.

"Listen! Isn't that code?" he yelled to the amazed sailor, thrusting the listening tubes over his head. "You in the radio shack—stand by to call the admiral's office."

"Yeah, it's code. Who the hell's sending radio under water?" said the radio man, not understanding.

Sherwood whirled the K-tube dials. The source of the sound, as he had guessed in a flash of inspiration, was the low, deserted shore of New Jersey. Some one there was operating an underwater oscillator. In this way the findings of the spies ashore were transmitted to the U-boat without using wireless, and Oglethorpe, back in Hoboken, had the key to the code.

"Call the admiral!" Sherwood shouted. Say: " 'Intercepting shore message to U-boat as follows.' " Intently the coxswain peered at the letters traced by the listener's pencil. "KVTRA—MUECX—HOMCY—"

As the *702's* radio began to crackle the listener's pencil paused.

"He's stopped."

"Listen for the reply. Locate it. That's the U-boat," Sherwood breathed.

Seamen who had been seasick or exhausted a moment ago had risen and were crowding around him. Hartley's gaunt face rose through the hatch leading to his quarters.

"General quarters," the skipper remarked. "How do you know it's a submarine, Sherwood?"

The coxswain shook his head. No time for explanations now. The listener's pencil moved again.

"Still the shore," he remarked. The radio crackled as Sherwood relayed the new message. HIKBD—FRTSP—DWOOC.

Only the three code groups, and again, silence. For one, two, three, four minutes.

"Message from the admiral's office," sang out the radio man. "It's in code, Mr. Hartley! Signed Oglethorpe!"

Keith sprang into the cabin for the *702's* code book, but that message was not decoded then.

"Periscope! Two points on the starboard bow!" bawled a lookout.

His shout was followed by the clang of engine telegraphs and a ringing order from Hartley.

"Cast loose and provide! With flat nosed shell, load. Range twenty-five hundred. Deflection—fifty-two!" All without pause.

Sherwood sprang for the Y-gun, set the bombs at forty feet, and jerked out the safety pins. Nothing more for him to do until the chaser had crossed that mile and a quarter of sea and forced the submarine under. Excitedly Sherwood peered ahead.

Instead of submerging, the U-boat was rising to fight gun to gun on the surface. Gray-green against the sea the coxswain saw not only a periscope, but a conning tower from which leaped the figures of men, tiny as ants at that distance, to cluster around the breech of a long six-inch gun that the U-boat carried on its forward deck.

"Fire when on," ordered Hartley.

When on, indeed! To hold the gun sights on the target in such a sea was beyond the power of any gun pointer ever born. The stubby three-inch gun carried by the *702* was trained with a shoulder stock, like a rifle, pointed by a hand wheel. As the chaser plunged and coasted over the big combers the gun pointed could hardly keep his feet on the jerking deck. The muzzle wobbled from side to side, the bow of the ship moved up and down faster than he could turn the wheel.

He fired on the fly, but where the shell went Sherwood had no idea. Hundreds of yards, certainly, from the U-boat.

The Germans were also having their troubles. Waves washed knee deep around the gun crew, but the heavy submarine, low in the water, provided a gun platform comparatively stable. An orange flash winked from the muzzle over the six-inch. A shell roared directly over the chaser, and flung up a high column of water behind her.

"Down five hundred!" sang out Hartley to the sight setter.

Stopwatch in hand, the skipper had caught the flash and timed the range by the sound of the report. With fierce pride Sherwood forgot that this gaunt ensign had been seasick and useless these last six weeks. Hartley was going to close and bomb.

The three-inch gun barked. Its shell was as wild as the first, and the U-boat's answering shot flung up a column of spray fifty yards beyond the chaser's bow. The *702* was now bracketed as to range. The German deflection had always been perfect.

"Down three hundred," snapped Hartley. Still a mile of open sea to cross.

There was a blinding flash, a terrific concussion.

A WHIRLING mist cleared from Sherwood's eyes. Slowly and bit by bit perception returned. He was lying on his back on the engine room skylight, ten feet from his post, when the shell exploded. The stern of the chaser was a splintered wreck. The roof of the galley was caved in. The two bombs and the seaman standing beside them had vanished. Then the *702* had been hit! Yet the Y-gun stood; the engines roared on. Sherwood's hands explored his own body. He seemed to be all right—no, his left arm was numb. His fingers came away smeared with blood. He pulled himself erect.

The mast was sheared off a foot above the chart house. At Sherwood's feet Garfoyle, a heavy set seaman with pale yellow hair clipped close to his head, lay across the ammunition boxes of the two machine guns, seemingly unwounded. Within the chart house Hartley lay on the floor, one blood stained hand pressed to a wound left by a shell fragment.

"Carry on," he whispered.

"Carry on!" Sherwood barked at the helmsman.

On the forward deck the three-inch gun barked. A glance showed a gaping hole through the chaser's bow and deck just under the anchor hawser. The third German shell had ricocheted from a wave crest, smashed upward high above the waterline, sheared off the mast, and then exploded fully twenty feet in the air.

A column of spray leaped from the sea ten feet away. The fourth shell had missed. Of the five in the chaser's gun crew, three still lay on the deck, felled by the flying splinters of the deck. Keith, slight as he was, was training the gun; the third loader was pulling the wounded men away by the heels, by the arms, any way to get room to pass shells.

For an instant Sherwood wanted to get Keith away from the gun. His greater strength might hold it straight. But instead he turned and flung himself upon the machine guns.

Sight setting and aiming—useless in that sea. He pulled the trigger back and held it for a fifty shot burst. Some of his shots were flying into the sky, some churned the sea not twenty-five yards away. No matter. As the gun swept up and down the muzzle passed and repassed that cluster of figures on the submarine's low neck.

The barrel grew hot under his fingers. Even a Lewis would jam soon at this rate of fire. No matter. As the drum emptied they caught up another, a third. A shell screamed over his head. Only a thousand yards now. The chaser poised on a wave crest. Momentarily the spitting machine gun was steady.

The cluster of German gunners visible over the foresight fell apart, tumbling to right and left like tiny ten pins. A wave broke across the low deck, and when it passed there was but one man who leaped to his feet. That German fired the gun, but this time there was no roar and leap of spray near the speeding *702*. Sherwood sprayed bullets at the tiny target. Point blank range now for both of them. The German flung open the gun breech, while Sherwood's foresight traced tiny circles around him. He was struggling to seat the heavy shell when he suddenly flung up his hands and went down. The submarine deck was clear. Then with an abruptness that made Sherwood gasp, the U-boat made a crash dive. She vanished like an apparition.

Straight for the spot where she had been went the chaser. Sherwood jerked the lanyard of the Y-gun. The two bombs rose slowly into the air, arched and fell. Astern twin columns of spray and black smoke spouted a hundred feet high. The shock aboard the chaser was like running aground. Under the water it would be far greater.

"Stop! Down tubes!" Sherwood shouted, ignoring the fact that Keith was the officer in command.

Used to obeying the coxswain at sea, the man at the wheel obeyed, and Iowa ran from the gun crew to the C-tube. Breathlessly Sherwood waited. He had been near the spot where the sub went under. Perhaps those bombs has smashed that gray hull.

"Twenty degrees starboard!" called Iowa. "She's close, but she's going like hell out to sea."

"Up tubes. Twenty degrees right rudder," said Sherwood grimly. Victory was still to win. Though a single chaser can keep in contact with a submarine, at least two are needed to obtain the cross bearings that will enable them to anticipate the course of a submarine zigzagging under the surface.

"He's leaking oil! Stand by to bomb!" yelled Mr. Keith on forward deck.

To hoist two or three hundred pounds from the magazine and reload the Y-gun took more that Sherwood's strength. He called for Scott to help him. Under full speed of two engines, but strangely heavy in the water, the *702* closed in on the spreading path of oil that traced a course straight out to sea, followed and passed ahead of it.

"Fire!" yelled Keith.

Again the heavy shock, again the twin columns astern. And again Iowa re-

ported that the sub was under way.

Tugging the heavy bombs on deck for the third shot, Sherwood stopped. They were the last two bombs the chaser had. He ran into the chart house, caught Keith by the shoulder.

"I'm loading our last bombs. If they miss we're done!" he panted.

"Well?" snapped the ensign. A jerk of his hand indicated the supine figures on deck, the shattered bow through which the huge seas spouted as the *702* buried her nose. "Back to your post!"

"Like hell I will. We don't drop bombs until we can get us a sub."

"This mutiny?"

"No. Just damn' sense," Sherwood rasped. "Don't lose your head, Keith. How we goin' to keep Heinie under water with our bombs gone? He tried coming up once, and may again. We got to keep contact—there's a fifty ship convoy coming out tonight."

"How do you know that?" snarled the officer.

"Never mind. I do." Sherwood towered over the little officer, caught him by both shoulders, and easily held him motionless.

"Call it mutiny if you like," the coxswain said deep in his throat. "I've commanded this ship as much as you have, and we'll see who the crew'll obey in a pinch. But I'm trying to get a sub! We can't call help with our aerial gone. It's up to us!"

"But what the devil are we going to do?"

"Keep our bombs till we know they'll hit. Leave the rest to me—as usual." Sherwood was more determined.

"It's a fact oil don't mean much," Keith muttered as though to excuse himself. "The latest dope is that the Germans spill it deliberately to stop pursuit. Maybe you're right."

"Thanks," snapped Sherwood.

Excitement made him unconscious of the sarcasm. Scott, wondering what was happening, pushed into the chart house.

"How are your engines, Al?" Sherwood demanded.

Again he was in actual command of the chaser, and the condition of the engines was vital in the long chase which confronted him.

On Scott's forehead the horizontal wrinkles deepened.

"The *engines* ain't bad," he replied, with a significance that made Sherwood catch his breath. "Shell fragment cracked a cylinder, and the starboard engine smashed itself. Dynamo's ripped all apart. Air tanks are O.K.

"What is wrong? We're sinking by the stern," said Scott stolidly. "I started the pumps when the shell hit, and the water's over the floor already. I guess some fragments made a sieve out of us aft."

At Sherwood's feet Hartley gave a stifled groan. The coxswain himself became conscious of the burning pain in his arm, and that blood from the flesh wound was dripping from his fingers.

"How long will we last?" Keith asked.

"I dunno. Maybe till dark if we can work the hand pumps fast enough," Scott estimated.

"Don't—turn—back," Hartley whispered.

"No, sir," Sherwood responded instantly. He forced a grin. "Heinie's as badly off. That oil slick's getting wider—he ain't pouring it out to kid us! Think you can keep up with him, Al? We'll lose speed as we settle lower in the water."

"Sure!" Al grunted.

On the trail of the wounded submarine the shattered chaser plunged straight out to sea. Behind her the low Jersey coastline grew dim and disappeared.

CHAPTER IX

THE DARKEST SEAS

FROM vague recollections of lessons in first aid Sherwood bandaged the wounded, tied a life preserver around each and laid the four inside the netting of the life raft. Sometime within the first hour one died. The exact moment was never known, though the pumping gang was swaying to and fro a

yard from the dying sailor's feet. Reaction from the battle left the crew bone weary, with no strength or attention to spare save for their ship and the thin film of oil that rose through the waves ahead. The pump gang almost envied the wounded, who could rest. For the sound men there was too much to do.

A half hour at the pumps. An hour of struggle to ring a radio antenna from the wire rope taken from the rail. A half hour at the wheel and listening tubes, then back to the pumps again. Keith worked as one of the crew. Sherwood, because of the flesh wound in his arm, conducted the battle of wits and endurance with the submerged U-boat.

He dropped listening tubes, got a bearing, then ran ahead two, three, four hundred yards and listened again. His object was to anticipate the U-boat's speed and course. If he could get ahead of it, wait with lowered tubes until it glided beneath him, then start again he could drop one of his precious bombs with the probability of a hit.

But the U-boat was also equipped with listening devices. It could locate Sherwood, and plot his course and speed. When he began to hold position close above his quarry the U-boat slowed down, stopped, turned in its tracks and sailed in the opposite direction. Constantly it dove or rose near the surface in order that the trail of oil should be a false guide to its position.

By the changes of course and the reports of the listeners Sherwood got to know the personality of the U-boat captain, as he would have known a man with whom he had talked in the dark, but never seen. The German was bold. He took long chances to trick Sherwood into dropping a bomb uselessly, or to get far enough away to resume the fight on the surface. He could guess how conditions were aboard the subchaser. The sound of the propellers was like a pulse to a physician.

Even when the submarine was going rapidly, two hours after the start of the chase, its propeller turned slower by twenty revolutions a minute. Sherwood diagnosed the trouble as a leak which was damaging its batteries with salt water. The air of the battery room would be choking with chlorine. The submarine would be forced up.

Nor could Sherwood make his old speed. The stern was down a foot, and the chaser plunged awkwardly through the big seas. Even in the engine room the water was rising fast. It slopped from the bilges into the carbureter. More and more often the engines coughed and stopped. Scott was forced to use the auxiliary engine to compress air instead of pumping. By twilight an occasional wave sloshed across the stern. One by one the crew donned life preservers—casually, as though there was no great need. The antenna was finished, but the improvised insulators grounded the current.

Keith came to Sherwood and lighted a cigaret. The match light in the dusk revealed blue circles under his eyes. Sweat and spray plastered the pale blond hair to his skull. With parallel rulers he transferred the record of the chase to the navigating chart, penciled in the course to port lightly, and grunted.

"Fifty miles home. Funny thing. We're right in the usual convoy track."

Sherwood rang for full speed and sent the chaser on the trail of the elusive U-boat. As darkness fell the oil had become impossible to follow. Keith continued:

"We've chased six hours. No nearer getting Heinie than when we started. We'll sink before we can get back to port, anyhow. The wounded can't stand a night floating around in this sea, even if the rest of us can—and have the luck to be picked up. I don't relish the idea of drifting around alone in the dark, with the waves breaking over my head."

"Yeah, I know. Damn' little kick passing out that way," Sherwood answered.

"I'm not being yellow," the ensign continued doggedly. "If we'd accomplish anything by it, well, that would be that. But I put this up to you, just as I would

to Mr. Hartley. Wouldn't the better tactics be to drop our bombs and turn back for port following the convoy track? If we meet a convoy we tell them where the submarine is, so that they can zigzag miles away from it."

Slowly Sherwood shook his head.

"We could say where Heinie had been. But unless we're squatting right over him, we can't say where he is. Your idea would give us a better chance of being picked up. But I vote to stick."

"I suppose you're right," said the ensign. "Only it may be so useless. If we could just be sure of a fight—"

"Ever since last May we've been doing things that turned out useless. This may be one. Anyway—" Sherwood smiled grimly in the dark— "it'll be our last useless job!"

He stopped the engines and ordered the tubes down. Keith trudged back to the pumps.

"Heinie's stopped!" called Iowa from the C-tube.

The clank of the pumps ceased. The crew was looking for the telltale oil slick. There was only darkness, out of which heavy seas rolled down upon them.

"Of course, the searchlight would be smashed," Keith grumbled.

He flashed the feeble rays of a hand electric light on the water.

"Get the marker line," ordered Sherwood. "If he's bottomed, we'll drag for him."

Instead of the red wooden buoy used in daytime, the coxswain tied a ring life preserver equipped with an automatic light to the weight. When this was thrown overboard a tiny white flame spurted up which wind and sea could not extinguish.

"There's a convoy coming!" said Iowa suddenly. "It bears—say, it must be five miles wide. There's ships everywhere

"Light a flare and meet it," Keith cried.

"Nix! It's too close to change course if we heard it in the C-tubes!" snapped Sherwood.

He pressed the general quarters buzzer to still argument by sending the crew to their posts, and ran to the engine room hatch.

"Soak a big bunch of waste in gas and pass it up," he commanded. "Quick, Al!"

He ran to the C-tube while the flare was being made. From the chart house Keith was signaling with the blinker tube to warn the convoy. A green star of a Very pistol arched up in answer, but the noise of propellers in Sherwood's ears grew in volume like the thunder of charging cavalry. Far to left and right the searchlights of the destroyers in the van stabbed the dark. They were abreast of Sherwood, a mile away, too far to reach the scene of action. The noise of the oncoming troopships grew deafening. One huge ship seemed headed straight upon him, but still no sound from the U-boat! Would he lurk on the bottom forever? Had he slipped away?

Almost too late some sixth sense warned Sherwood of the full daring of the U-boat captain's tactics. Instantly the coxswain struck a match and ignited the pile of gasoline soaked waste. A stream of orange flame illuminated a wide belt of sea, revealed the black upright of a periscope projecting from the waves not fifty feet away. Trusting to the darkness, Heinie had simply blown tanks and floated upward to the attack.

No time to get the *702* under way. With clenched teeth Sherwood fired the Y-gun. The bombs leaped upward. Four seconds meant the finish of chaser and U-boat alike. Four seconds remained.

"On deck all hands!" Sherwood screamed. "Scottie—on deck!"

The chaser leaped upward beneath his feet. Clear in the light of the flare a column of foam spouted from the sea, lifting in its midst the hull of the U-boat. There was a wide rent amidships.

And then the flare winked out. From both sides the water thrown up by the bombs rolled upon the chaser. A wave went over Sherwood's head. The deck dropped away as the weight of the engines pulled the *702* down by the stern.

Mechanically he gripped the rail.

Though the *702* was shattered by the explosion, her wooden construction kept her from sinking entirely. Gas tanks amidship, emptied by the continuous running of the past forty-eight hours, buoyed her up. Her bow lifted straight into the air as the stern sank. Men swarmed upon what had been the front of the chart house, clung to the wire rails.

"SCOTTIE?" shouted Sherwood in the dark.

"Aye, aye!" boomed the machinist.

"Keith?"

"Right! I got the life raft with the wounded, too!"

Like a mountain out of the dark loomed the hull of a troopship. The wave from its bow washed over the heads of the clinging chaser men. The high iron sides seemed minutes in passing.

"Heinie couldn't have missed that!" gasped Sherwood, spitting out a mouthful of salt water. "Iowa?"

"Here!"

"Let anybody that ain't here sing out!" gasped O'Connor, the irresponsible.

Another troopship rushed past. Catching sight of the chaser's bow, she blazed away with one pounder, missed and was gone.

"Garfoyle?" Sherwood choked. "Steady, boys, they're not good enough shots to hit us!" He continued to call the roll.

Amazingly enough, not a man had been lost in the explosion of the last bombs. Five troopships passed before the muster was complete, but great as the danger of collision and gunfire was, the silence and the darkness that succeeded the passing of the last vessel was worse than any peril. The waves broke over the sailors.

"We got a sub," cried Sherwood through chattering teeth. He tried to feel exultant, but he was too cold. "There were fifty ships, and every one of them safe to sea now."

"I'm getting tired," a voice put in; Garfoyle's voice, Sherwood thought. "What's the use waiting? Convoys can't turn back. Think of Matthews."

"Shut up!" ordered Sherwood. "Move over there, you, and let me get at the C-tube. We'll find out what's happening, anyhow."

Though Sherwood's object was simply to do something or anything to take the minds of the men off their fatigue, he cried out in unfeigned amazement as the plugs went into his ears.

"A ship?" demanded Keith.

"Dozens of ships. I can't tell their bearings, of course," the coxswain answered slowly. "No, it's Heinie. I can still hear him, under water."

"Didn't we get him?" swore Keith.

"We got him all right. He's pounding on the hull with a hammer. *Bang-bang—bang-bang—bang! Bang-bang—bang!*"

"He's in the dark, too," said Iowa. "Poor devil, I hope he ain't alone. Cut off in a compartment down there, without air—"

"Faith, can't we bang him an answer?" cried O'Connor, and thumped the thin planks of the chart house with his fist.

"He couldn't hear," said Sherwood quietly. "He keeps banging out the same thing."

"Dash, dash, dot. Dash, dot—say, that's Morse!" spoke up the wireless operator. "It's only used on land in the United States. D'ye think he can be an American? Maybe he lived in the States once."

"No!"

But the sailor whom his shipmates had known as Garfoyle contradicted.

"I lived in Hamburg till I was thirteen, and my right name's Schmitt," he said. "A country worth coming to is worth fighting for, my father says to me. That Heinie might have lived in the States."

"He's stopped now," said Sherwood, and dropped the ear pieces into the dark water.

So suddenly that he gasped, a searchlight cut the dark and rested full upon them. Next appeared the bright red and green running lights of a subchaser scarcely a hundred yards away; in a moment the *703* was alongside. A

dozen ropes were thrown, and the crew of the *702* dragged over the rail. More slowly, Hartley and the three wounded men were lifted from the water.

"The rest were lost in action," said Sherwood as his feet touched deck.

Dimly he realized he was addressing Squadron Commander Le Grand; and he waited to be bawled out for omitting the sir. But Le Grand was pumping him by the hand enthusiastically. The weary coxswain wished the lieutenant would stop. Above the two stripes of gold lace on Le Grand's sleeve the star had been removed. That was amusing—the chasers were not doing sea duty! What would Washington say, tomorrow?

"Brilliant exploit! Congratulations!" Le Grand was babbling. "Code you intercepted told convoy was going out, but it could not be held. Second message ordered submarine to attack you. We warned you, but your signals ceased. We thought you were lost. Couldn't spare chasers to investigate. Needed everything for the convoy."

"Yeah, we were attacked, all right," muttered Sherwood.

So that was what Oglethorpe's message had meant. Kind of funny. Oglethorpe sitting in his office, helping out the guys at sea.

"How'd you find us, here?" Sherwood muttered.

"A very strange thing! We had to wait till the convoy was by, of course, and we had very little idea of your position, until we heard a knocking sound under water—

"Heinie. He was a good guy."

"I don't understand you."

"You wouldn't."

"Because you sunk a sub gives you no license to be insubordinate," said Le Grand—but mildly, very mildly. "I've learned from the skipper of this boat that you were—er—the actual commander of the *702*. Of course, he thought you had all been lost, or he wouldn't have spoken. But I shall see you get credit, Coxswain. I—er—received a request from a Lieutenant Oglethorpe to transfer you to the Intelligence, but if you'd prefer to command a chaser—"

By an effort Sherwood shook off his fatigue.

"I guess Mary Shea would rather see me a skipper, sir," he answered. "And, well, I'm not so anxious to transfer as I was. I thought I wasn't doing anything, but I've learned you never can tell what service is going to be useless in war. Except, of course—"

The coxswain paused. He was thinking of Matthews, of Hartley, of Garfoyle, of the U-boat commander.

"Except what?" Le Grand prompted.

"War itself," said Sherwood succinctly.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Behind Time

E. S. DELLINGER, whose stories of railroading and how it's done, have often appeared in *Adventure*, gives us the history of a story of his that appeared some time ago. We are sorry that it did not get into the same book with Mr. Dellinger's yarn, but—anyway, how many of you recall the tale?

In the fall of 1922, while a strike was going on in the shop crafts, a coal drag headed in at Solano on the branch of the E. P. & SW., which runs into Dawson, New Mexico, from Tucumcari. Their air was on the bum and they had to get an engine from Tucumcari to help them down the hill.

When the engine came back for them, they pulled out of Solano without testing the air, because there was a dynamiter in the train which made it necessary for them to bleed off the cars after the air was set. Some boys, so the story goes, had, in playing about the train, turned an angle cock in the train line, and thereby cut out the air from the rear end. The engine crews did not realize their condition until they tried to stop to spot the engines at the chutes at Cabeza for coal and water. There was no train ahead of them. There was no station halfway down the hill, but the men on the head end, all except one fireman, stayed with the train and tried to stop it with hand brakes. Every man who stayed was killed. Some of them were not found for nearly a week after the wreck. The conductor and hind brakeman cut off the caboose and saved themselves from being in the wreck. They and the fireman

who jumped were all discharged for neglect of duty, I believe. Before writing this story, I got a boy, who was there while the wreck was being cleared, to go over the ground with me, got from him the engine story of the wreck, and got a picture of the engines after they had been piled in the ditch.

The characters were all fictitious, but much of the incident was fact.—E. S. DELLINGER, Springer, N. M.

White Red Men

TAKING his pipe in his hand, Charles Snow, of our writers' brigade, tells an interesting story that may clear up some of the mystery surrounding the presence of white blood among the San Blas Indians of the Darien.

The San Blas Indians of the upper reaches of the Chuqunaque River in the Darien were back as far as 1898, when I first went out to Colombia, known to have a peculiar strain of white blood that occasionally cropped out. These Indians were locally known as Chocos to distinguish them from the Cholos of the lower country toward the Pacific.

My late half brother, J. Allen Veatch, was for five years manager of the famous old Darien Mines at Cana. I was out there with him until I was sent home with fever. We often heard tales of white Indians, or albinos, among the Chocos in those days. However, it was impossible to verify these stories as no white man would venture into the country. The Chocos were peaceable enough until their territory was entered. Even then they would first warn an intruder and endeavor to turn him back. If he did not go, he died.

You may recall that in 1913 R. O. Marsh, who had explored the San Blas country, had a series of articles on the White Indians of the Darien in "World's Work". Previous to leaving Panama Marsh got into some sort of trouble over alleged advice to the Indians, and as I got it was forced to take refuge on an American cruiser. I think it was the *Cleveland*. I happened to be in Panama about the time the ship sailed from Colon, taking Marsh with it.

One day while I was taking with a friend, Captain James, we got to talking about the so-called white Chocos. James had once been an officer in the employ of the Royal Mail, but at the time I knew him was master of a small steamer plying between Panama and Real, the head of navigation on the Tuira, which is near where it joins the Chuqunaque.

According to James he had anchored off Real one afternoon when a canoe load of Chocos came alongside. Their chief, in good Spanish, asked if he might come aboard and talk. James replied that this would be agreeable after he had worked cargo. In the days when I was in the country the Chocos often came down river with rubber, and most of them wore necklaces of nuggets, but seemed to place little or no value on the gold. However, they would not sell any of it.

According to James the chief came aboard that evening, and he was surprised to find that he was a Mason. James himself being a Mason, assured me that there could be no mistake in this.

He was at once interested as to how the old Choco had been made a Mason, and the latter told him that back in the days of Morgan, the pirate, there had been times when Morgan had been pressed so hard that he had taken refuge in the Gulf of Darien.

There they had made friends with the Chocos, and for the protection they had given, the Indians were initiated into the order.

The chief said that several of Morgan's men had deserted, and married Choco women, and that the occasional white Indian or the more frequent one with a light tinge to his hair and eyes was nothing more than the recurrence of this white strain.

James also said that the chief was a man of apparent good intelligence, and of some education as he spoke Spanish fluently, and a little English. I am sending the story for what it is worth, so to speak, but I have every confidence in the story Captain James told me.—CHAS. H. SNOW.

That Viking Cache

THE CITY EDITOR of the *Amherst Daily News*, Nova Scotia, adds to the information on the Norse Treasure. He has assured us that the province that gave us "iron men and wooden ships" also offers us some of the best all around automobile roads of the Dominion. Concerning the baffling treasure on Oak Island, he says:

I was deeply interested in an article in a recent issue of the *Adventure* dealing with the treasure trove at Oak Island, N. S. The author of the article assuredly had his facts relating to the actual treasure pit, but whether his theories relative to the actual treasure are correct still remains a matter of surmise. I myself have written two or three articles on the subject, having secured the manuscript dealing with the history of the island from Fred Blair, a former Amherstonian who is now residing in the State of Massachusetts. Mr. Blair still holds the lease of the island.

Many people of Amherst, N. S., were financially interested in the undertaking to recover this treasure, and the tiny piece of parchment brought to the surface by the boring drill, as well as the gold links, have been actually seen by many veteran residents of the town.

An article from my typewriter appeared several months ago in the *Montreal Standard*, dealing at greater length with the efforts of the treasure seekers to reach the bottom of the pits and unearth the golden chests that are presumed to rest at the bottom. It is passing strange that modern engineering does not seem able to solve some method of solving

the mystery of Oak Island, but nevertheless as little is known of the mystery as the day when the search was commenced.—RONALD M. ROSS.

Nostalgia

IN THE charming light of reminiscence, even, it is hard to visualize such a great and famous man as John Masefield as a fresh faced 'prentice lad, going down to the sea for the first time in ships. It was just before the turn of the century, and she was the *Gilcruix*—but let comrade Hurst tell you.

H. M. S. *Conway* was a training ship for officers, in the River Mersey, Liverpool, where I was entered as a cadet at the end of 1888. John Masefield, the poet, joined her a year after I left to go to sea in the *Copley*, which ship he mentions in his poem "Ships". "The *Copley*, swift . . ." She belonged to the White Star Line, which then had a large fleet of sailing ships, and we made a record in her from Hamburg to Calcutta. With me were William Marshall, who went in the navy, served through the war, but went back to the White Star, and is now W. Marshall, R.N.R., D.S.O., etc., captain of, I think, the *Olympic*. My other shipmate was E. J. Headlam, just retired with a D.S.O. Admiral rank, and Director of the Royal Indian Marine, now Indian Navy. I was transferred to the *Gilcruix*, to be senior to five youngsters from the *Conway*. Masefield was one of them. A delicate kid who should never have been sent to sea in such ships. We sent him home by steamer from Iquique, very sick. On the *Gilcruix* was a tubercular young man, who was signed on as "painter" through the kindness of the second officer. He was a sign painter, who never tried to paint a picture. His name was Crouch, and he fell from aloft and died saying "It will go on!" He is the original of Masefield's "Dauber", and that poem is an account of our voyage round the Horn in the *Gilcruix*. Crouch meant the gasket would go on the sail, which he was furling when he fell, but Masefield has cleverly made an esoteric meaning of the words, and an excellent poem, in which I can recognize all the characters, including myself—although Masefield did not say this when I saw him again, some years ago, in Seattle. He made me rather tough in the poem, so I did not ask him!—S. B. H. HURST.

Criticism

COMRADE GARDNER is one of several readers of *Adventure* who have noted a similarity between "The Stewing Pot Case", by James W. Bennett and Soong Kwen-ling, and a story that is found in no less a classic than Rabelais. Herewith we give Comrade Gardner's letter and a reply by one of the authors of the story.

I read every issue of *Adventure* and enjoy them a great deal. In the June 1st number, while reading "The Stewing Pot Case", by James W. Bennett and Soong Kwen-ling, something clicked in my memory when I came to the solution. I traced it down and here is the result; if you will turn to Chapter XXXVII, Book 3, of Rabelais' "Gargantua and Pantagruel", you will find a case which is so nearly the same that the coincidence is little short of miraculous. I don't know who originated the yarn, and I doubt if many of your readers noted the similarity, but just wondered if you knew of this perhaps unconscious plagiarism. Do you suppose there was some connection between France and China in 1540, or thereabouts, whereby the stories of the two countries were exchanged?—W. A. GARDNER.

Students of Rabelais know that he drew from many sources. He may have got the idea from the Italian writer, Boccaccio, who lived more than a hundred years earlier. Scholars aver that they have found the story in Boccaccio's work. Or maybe it came from China via the Turks who, at the time Rabelais lived, controlled the ancient trade routes. But let Mr. Bennett speak.

The Editor of *Adventure* has brought to my attention the fact that the collaborated story which I did with Soong Kwen-ling, a Chinese, called "The Stewing Pot Case", parallels in plot a story in Rabelais. And he has kindly given me this opportunity to make explanation.

Let me state that the manuscript of "The Stewing Pot Case" was given me, a number of years ago, while I was in Shanghai lecturing at a Chinese university. The author was a blind Chinese who had taught himself English after a fashion, and to use a typewriter, also, after a fashion. His knowledge of foreign literature was practically nil, and what he had been able to learn of it, was by having stories read him by other students. Since even the most advanced students spoke and read but the simplest English and no French, I have no hesitation in saying that it was an impossibility for him to have either read or heard of the Rabelais story. I, also, had not heard of it. If I had, I should never have permitted the manuscript to leave my desk. I say this very firmly, even though such writers as Rabelais have been copied times innumerable and apparently without adverse criticism, as for example Granville Barker's production, "The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife". I also call to mind the countless versions of the Francesca da Rimini story which originally appeared in Dante.

What has happened, I feel positive, is that Soong

Kwen-ling has either by coincidence paralleled the Rabelais tale, or he has written down an old Chinese folk story as old or possibly older than the story of Rabelais', which offers the same parallelism.

While I feel that my own writing record over the past fifteen years is such that I do not need to offer anything in my own defense, nevertheless I am impelled to this defense of my collaborator, Mr. Soong.

I trust that this covers the case.—JAMES W. BENNETT.

COME AND GET IT!

I'VE et in lots o' places
Where th' grub wuz fit fer kings.
I've chawed on oysters, fried an' raw,
An' other shellfish things.
I've dreamt on boiled lobster,
An' I've et the flesh of shark.
I've choked down stew in Injun camps
When I'd swear th' meat could bark!
Shore I've tackled grub regardless
Where, by good luck, I hev met it.
But give me chow from ol' Dutch pots
When cook calls, "Come an' get it!"

I've minced on grub from white capped chefs
In th' town called gay Paree.
An' once I sampled England's best
With George, his Majesty.
I've waded through rank garlic,
And Ital-i-an spaghet'.
But the Chinese junk what filled me once
Is still a mystery yet.
Ah—th' grub that lives in memory,
An' it seems I can't ferget it,
Is the chuck we get at roundup time
When cook calls, "Come an' get it!"

Shore, on earth there's lots o' places
Where they sling good chow an' chuck,
Whether lunch fer queens, or ground hog
Fer th' stoic Injun Buck.
But bacon an' *frijoles*
An' th' good ol' sourdough,
Jest sets my stummick wishin'
An' sets me thinkin' slow,
Of the fryin' beef an' coffee
Thet makes me hungry if I let it
From the old camp cook at roundup time
Who hollers, "Come an' get it!"

True, th' grub of kings an' monarchs
Is rare 'n' rich 'n' strange
But me fer th' he-man grub you get
When ridin' on th' range.
An' boys, I'll go a whoopin'
When I leave this earthly ball
If, when Gabriel blows his trumpet,
I c'n hear Saint Peter call, "Come an' get it!"

—GLENN S. POTTER

Rodeo

WEST and East will mingle at Madison Square Garden, New York, from October 24 to November 2, when the fourth annual World Series Rodeo will be held. The thrilling sports of the cattle range, which were originated years ago, purely for the pleasure of the cowboy contenders, have not only captured the hearts of millions of "fans" in the West but have taken firm hold in the East.

The World Series Rodeo is competitive from start to finish. There is none of the old Wild West show hippodrome about it. Every event is for cash prizes. Each competitor pays his own expenses, and his only financial returns are from the prizes. The bucking horses are furnished by the management, and scouts have been touring the West for weeks, picking up outlaw horses that have established reputations as wreckers of cowboy hopes. No rider knows what horse he is to ride, as numbers are drawn from a hat, the evening before each contest. For the steer wrestling, or bulldogging as it is called in the West, wild Brahma steers, credited with being the quickest afoot, are secured from Texas and Old Mexico.

Since the establishment of the rodeo in the West, as a permanent feature of entertainment from San Antonio to Calgary and from Cheyenne to Pendleton, a marvelous class of cowboy riders, ropers and bulldoggers has been developed. Last year there were more than 125 entries for the World Series Rodeo in New York, and this year there will be even more. The New York public has taken to this sport, and is quick to show its appreciation of any superior bit of horsemanship or steer wrestling. The contestants feel as much at home in Madison Square Garden as they do in any Western arena, and the champions are pointed out on Broadway during rodeo week just as they are in Cheyenne while the Frontier Days' show is on.

The above notice comes from the management.

To those who (like us here in the *Adventure* office) enjoy a rip-roaring exhibition of range tactics, but can seldom travel any farther West than Eighth Avenue to see one, we say, "See you at the World Series Rodeo."

—ANTHONY M. RUD

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Firearms

THE set trigger, and other matters of interest to the firearms fan.

Request:—"1. How can one put a set trigger on a Stevens 'Favorite,' .22 cal.?

2. Is there any danger of a 40:70 single shot, made in 1874, and in good condition exploding front crystallization of the barrel?

3. Any danger from the same cause in a Springfield B-L .45, .70?

4. About how much would it cost to have a muzzle loading rifle re-bored from a .38 to a .40?

5. I have a chance to buy a cap-and-ball Colt revolver in fair condition for five dollars. Would it be a good buy, either as a relic or for occasional use?"

—H. L. PRICE, Aloha, Ore.

Reply, by Mr. Donegan Wiggins:—1. A set trigger can not be placed on a Stevens "Favorite," but the bent, or notch in the hammer where the trigger engages, can be dressed to the point where a very fine pull may be had. It's advisable to use an oil stone for this, instead of a file, and work with a small magnifying glass to keep from removing too much metal.

2. If the old rifle is in good condition, you need have no fear of shooting it, as I often use Civil War time Spencers and Henry rifles even today; I believe crystallization only affects steels used at high speeds, like auto parts, etc.

3. The old .45-70 Springfield is perfectly reliable, and safe with black powder loads, but I'd keep smokeless, especially High Velocity, out of it. I still use one sometimes.

4. The local man who re-bores rifle barrels charges six dollars for a breechloader, and I presume would charge the same for a muzzleloader, too. His name and address are:

Mr. Ben Hawkins, Route No. 6, Salem, Oregon. (Better write to him direct.)

5. I think that if the old Colt cap-and-ball revolver is in good shape, you will not be paying too much at five dollars. See that the cylinder shows no sign of being burned or worn through, and that the nipples are in good order. Use a greased felt wad between bullet and powder, and you'll be surprised at the way the old boy will send 'em over. Use the FFFG black powder, and caps very tight on the nipples, I believe the No. 12 is the right size. If caps are loose, or nipples badly worn, or bullets loose, you are apt to get more than one shot at a time.

Japanese Gamecock

BESIDES a stout heart and tough body, these birds, like the good boxer, must be proficient in footwork.

Request:—"As I have enjoyed several of your stories in *Adventure*, in most of which you speak of the Samurai, and as you are listed as one of *Ask Adventure's* authorities on Japan, I believe you can answer my questions.

What can you tell me about the Japanese game fowl, how bred, trained and fought? In this country they have the Shamo Jap, who is one tough customer to meet, although not favored much as a full bred. Are these fowl or any other bred by

the nobility in Japan? Or were they in the Golden Age?

A Southerner, born and raised, with forebears buried in this country in 1683, I have always been intensely interested in game birds, although I never pit them."—THOS. B. SWANN, Zanesville, Ohio.

Reply, by Mr. Sydney Herschel Small:—The "Shamo" Japanese cock isn't a fullbred bird to begin with, even before it was crossed further in this country. The Japanese word "Ainoku" really means half-breed or cross. The birds, especially in Japan, are generally large and heavy (you know that, of course) and are the commonest game birds in the Empire. They are slow maturing, and I am told that their gameness can't be depended upon until they are fully matured. They are fought in natural spurs, and the blows they give are such that bones and sometimes the neck go to pieces.

The true "Shamo" are about the same as the "Ainoku," but are purebred through carefully selected females instead of on common Malayan hens. It is also a slow fighter, and battles sometimes last over an hour. The dark colored birds only are fought; the lighter ones go into the pot. Reports differ on the Shamo's origin. Some say Siam, but I have an idea that India is more correct.

Next comes the "Seki" or "Ashura," of Shamo origin, and probably a very mixed breed. About two pounds lighter than the parent bird. Fairly fast, and dead game. Very short feathers make them look lighter than they are. They are very clever fighters, and preferred by the Japanese to the Shamo.

The last of the common Japanese cocks is the "Asil." I can't trace the name down, nor the history, but they are built on the slender lines admired by Japanese cockers. Fast and good fighters. Bred in sizes just over bantamweights to about seven pounds. I don't know where there are any in this country. The better Asils come in white. The Asil from Japan, I am told, is a second cousin to the Indian Asil, but I can't prove that. Anyhow, any one in this country who has a true Indian Asil isn't selling him. Selective breeding and culling under severe conditions for twenty-five centuries has made a marvelous bird, and one which can fight several days in succession. What his connection to the Malay Asil is I don't know either.

As far as training goes, the Shamo requires plenty of footwork; every one seems agreed on that. He has a small crop, gizzard and gut, suited for animal food rather than vegetable; a large, stout heart and tough, perfectly imbedded bloodvessels, which is why he is so hard to kill.

The real cockfighting years in Japan were in the "Golden Age," as you write. In 1874-5 every Samurai had his cocks, but now it is against the law, although birds are pitted just the same.

Out here, the last cockfight was held a year ago, in a bootlegger's barn. One cocker who brought his birds there says he'll never do it again, and knowing the sort of gang that must have been watching, I'll say for one that I don't blame him.

By the way, if any one says I'm wrong in saying that the Japanese Shamo isn't a purebred, but is really an Ainoku, I mean the Shamo as he's found in this country. And I'll stick to that. Even in Japan, the real Shamo is almost a thing of the past, and a Japanese friend of mine says that "Shamo" has come to mean almost anything these decadent days.

As to training, the Malayan system is used (or was used) in Japan, and many of the cockers imported Malays to train and pit their birds.

Colorado and Wyoming

BAGGING cougar must be more of a chase than a hunt, if he is the quitter sportsmen allege him to be.

Request:—"Do you know of any place where there is any trapping left in Colorado and Wyoming?

What would be the cost of a complete outfit for a green hand to start in?

If you know of any places for trapping and also know the bounty paid on different animals in those places, this information would be valuable to me also.

Can you give me the name of the best breed of dog to hunt cougars and bobcats?"

—CONRAD HOFFMAN, Aberdeen, Washington.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—Yes, there is fairly good trapping in both Colorado and Wyoming. However trapping successfully is considerable of a science and requires considerable knowledge of the habits of the different animals, which is only acquired by several years in the field or a season with an experienced trapper.

The only bounty paid by Colorado or Wyoming is paid by *The Denver Post,* Denver, Colo., which pays $25.00 for every mountain lion killed in Colorado. The United States Gov't and the States of Colorado and Wyoming, also several other States cooperate to exterminate predatory animals. The State puts up a certain amount of money and the Government as much or more. This money is used to hire Government hunters, and these hunters trap the year round for coyotes, wolves, and other predatory animals. They also trap a good many of the fur bearers during the fur season. There are lynx, fox, bobcats, weasel, skunk, muskrats, coyotes, wolves, otter and beaver in the Big Horn Mountains in Wyoming, and this would be as good a place as any to trap. You can write to Lew Jacobs, Ten Sleep, Wyo., and ask him if there are any trappers in the vicinity of Cloud Peak. I have not been up there for several years and do not know who may be up there.

A complete outfit, horses, traps, guns etcetera, would cost approximately from $200.00 up to most any amount you wished to spend, according to the elaborateness of the outfit.

A Pekinese could run any lion (cougar) off the earth. (This doesn't apply to bobcats, as they are the fiercest fighters for their size of any animal.) Cougars are the greatest of cowards and any good

trailing dogs are all right to hunt lions. As I have never used dogs to hunt lions or bobcats I can not say first hand which are the best breed to hunt with. I know several lion hunters and all of them use different breeds of dogs with about the same results.

Now if you have had no experience trapping I would not advise you to undertake it with a view of making money at it. However if you are determined to try it write me again and I will give you complete instructions.

Moonlight Photography

THEY are sometimes made by pointing a camera at the sun.

Request:—"Camped out here in the mountains, I would like to preserve some of the moonlight beauty with a 3-A Kodak. How is it done?

Secondly, what is the most comprehensive and at the same time not too technically worded book for an amateur photographer to make his Bible? The Eastman publication doesn't seem complete enough."—PAUL E. DROST, Tupper Lake, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—Making genuine moonlight photographs with a 3-A Kodak is just about out of the question. To begin with, a landscape under full moonlight would require probably a minimum of half an hour exposure, in which time the shadows would move conspicuously. And if the moon itself is in the picture, you can't give more than ten seconds, or the motion will blur the image. So I'm afraid the real thing is out.

But you can make moonlight pictures by sunlight. You have probably seen lots of postcards made by pointing the camera toward the sun and underexposing. The trouble with these is that they look like what they are—underexposed daylight scenes. The right way to do it is this: Give a normal but not excessive exposure, and develop the film about ¼ to ⅓ the normal time. This gives a negative in which the gradations are correct (which they are not in an underexposed one) but the shadows are lacking in detail, and the film as a whole is very thin.

Now, if you have observed (I mean *observed*) moonlight scenes you have found that they are differentiated from sunlight scenes in several ways. First, the whole tone of the scene is much lower; second, there is no color in foreground or middle distance; third, the shadows have no detail. *But,* although the shadows lack detail, they nevertheless give a sense of light and air—they are not flat black, like a print on gaslight paper from a flat negative. So the thing to do is to print in a medium which gives a feeling of "fatness" to the shadows i.e., multiple carbon (or carbro) or gum-platinum, or multiple gum, or bromoil. Do this, and if your technique is good you'll get a very fine representation of moonlight. I have such a picture, made some years ago, of a row of maples in full leaf, with, beyond them, a range of low hills, and a low "moon" in the sky.

I made the type of negative described, then made a multiple print in carbon; the first printing, to register the moon and sky, was in blue, and over that I put four printings of Ivory Black, each one printed a trifle lighter than the preceding one, to build up the depth and fatness of the foreground. A lot of work, yes, but the result was worth it. The principal thing to work for is to see what moonlight looks like, so that you'll know what to work for.

As for books, try "Saturday With My Camera," by Johnson. Also, I wrote one myself, because of the need for just such a book as you ask for. The title is "Pictorial Photography, Its Principles and Practice." Both are published by J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, Pa. Ask the American Photographic Publishing Company (428 Newbury Street, Boston 17, Mass.) for their list of books; they have a number on special phases of the work, though they don't get out any general book.

The Prussian Guard

FROM the time of Frederick I, it has maintained its enviable reputation as a "crack" outfit.

Request:—"I have heard a great deal about the Imperial Prussian Guard, and since I am interested in European history, and particularly World War history, I wonder if you'll give me some information about the actual merit and record of these troops.

Were these troops picked for physique or intelligence, and were their uniforms distinguishable from other German outfits?

How many did the Guards number? Were they held for special use or did they function as any other division in the line? And lastly, did they sustain their battle record in the past war?"

—CHRIS. T. HEISELMAN, Kingston, N. Y.

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—The Prussian Guard, although it deteriorated with the progress of the World War, remained among the best of the German troops until the end. On the intelligence maps maintained at the headquarters of the A. E. F., where all information of the enemy was compiled, the Guard units were always shown in red, the color that was used to indicate the most dangerous of the enemy forces.

In peace time the Guard was distinguished by special uniforms; its officers were selected from the best in the army, and its members had many special privileges and functions although rigorously trained. The cavalry division of the Guard served as the bodyguard of the Kaiser and members of the royal family were given honorary commissions in the cavalry and infantry regiments. In active service the Guard wore the field uniform of the German army with regimental markings.

The history of the Prussian Guard goes back two hundred years or more. Originally a palace guard for the kings of Prussia, the Guard was made a combat force by Frederick William I, who enlisted in it only men of six feet or more in height. His son,

Frederick the Great, substituted ordinary soldiers for the "giants" of his father, but he subjected them to such rigorous system of training that they became a "*corps d'élite*" and one of the mainstays of his great army which later changed the map of Europe.

After the Napoleonic Wars, and partly because of the example of the "Imperial Guard" of France, the Prussian guard was expanded to a small division. By 1860 it had become an army corps complete with all arms and auxiliary services. It was always employed as a unit and recruited with young men especially selected from each annual class called to the colors.

About the year 1900 it had grown until it numbered 20,000 men in two infantry divisions of four regiments each; a cavalry division, two field artillery regiments, a full complement of "corps" troops—pioneers, trains, hospitals, etc.

Under the German military system in use before the World War, each active unit of the army had its reserve and at the outbreak of the war the Guard reserve division was called to the colors and grouped with certain supernumary units of the active guard to form a Guard Reserve Corps. Other changes were made during the course of the war so that the strength of the guard varied. It probably never exceeded 100,000 men and averaged about 70,000. It was always counted among the "shock" troops of the German army but naturally deteriorated in value due to the severe losses sustained in action and the impossibility of replacing the killed and wounded with men of equal fighting ability.

Reptiles

ON THE constrictor's preying technique.

Request:—Please describe in detail, if you can, the exact method of procedure in the attack of these reptiles on their prey, giving the amount of time required to kill a large animal (such as a deer) and the relative proportion of tail beating, biting, or squeezing used to effect the kill."

—CARL V. ESKRIDGE, Abingdon, Va.

Reply, by Mr. Clifford H. Pope:—The large constrictors really do not crush their prey but simply wrap around it, drawing their coils tight at each successive exhalation of the victim's breath. The ground thus lost by the terrified prey can not be regained, and it soon strangles. The bones are not crushed nor is any great amount of force used. The victim almost kills itself. Snakes have an abundance of patience and probably wait countless hours for prey to cross their paths. They may drop from above or seize from beneath. The time required to kill a victim depends upon so many variable factors that I do not even dare make an estimate! Snakes never rend their prey—what can not be swallowed whole is abandoned.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

See next page for complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard small launch river and lake tripping and cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

Canoeing *Paddling, sailing, cruising; equipment and accessories, clubs, organizations, official meetings, regattas.*—EDGAR S. PERKINS, Copeland Manor, Libertyville, Illinois.

Yachting HENRY W. RUBINKAM, Chicago Yacht Club, Box 507, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Boating GEORGE W. SUTTON, 232 Madison Ave., Room 801, New York City.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

Motor Vehicles *Operation, legislative restrictions and Traffic.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

Automotive and Aircraft Engines *Design, operation and maintenance.*—EDMUND B. NEIL, care *Adventure.*

All Shotguns *including foreign and American makes; wing shooting.* JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers *including foreign and American makes.*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3 Box 75, Salem, Ore.

Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

First Aid on the Trail *Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Health hazard of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Health-Building Outdoors *How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel, right exercise, food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.*—CLAUDE P. FORDYCE.

Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., Falls City, Neb.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect; how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc.*—VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Forestry in the United States *Big-game hunting. guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer, 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 231 Eleventh St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps LIEUT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., 117 North Boulevard, Deland, Fla.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, c/o William H. Souls, 1481 Beacon St., Boston, Massachusetts.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.* —THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S". Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Herpetology *General information concerning reptiles and amphibians; their customs, habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venemous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.*—DR. FRANK E. LUTZ, Ramsey, N. J.

Ichthyology GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS, The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange. New. Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology (*a*) *Racial and tribal tradition, history and psychology; folklore and mythology.* (*b*) *Languages and the problems of race migration, national development and descent (authorities and bibliographies).* (*c*) *Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues, their affinities and plans for their study.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, 345 W. 23rd St., New York City.

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune,* New York City.

Basketball JOE F. CARR, 16 E. Broad St., Columbus, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "DANIEL," *The Evening Telegram,* 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Boxing JAMES P. DAWSON, The New York *Times,* Times Square, New York City.

Fencing JOHN V. GROMBACH, 1061 Madison Ave., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HERRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

The Sea Part 3 *British Waters.* Also old-time sailoring.—CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 5 *The Mediterranean; Islands and Coasts.* —CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

The Sea Part 6 *Arctic Ocean.* (*Siberian Waters*).—CAPT. C. L. OLIVER, care *Adventure.*

Hawaii DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

South Sea Islands JAMES STANLEY MEAGHER, 4322 Pine Street, Inglewood, Calif.

Philippine Islands BUCK CONNOR, Universal City, California.

Borneo CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**New Guinea** *Questions regarding the policy of the Government proceedings of Government officers not answered.*—L. P. B. ARMIT, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, via Sydney, Australia.

★**New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa.** TOM L. MILLS, *The Fielding Star,* Fielding, New Zealand.

★**Australia and Tasmania** ALAN FOLEY, 18a Sandbridge Street, Bondi, Sydney, Australia.

Asia Part 1 *Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States; and Yunnan.*—GORDON MACCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York.

Asia Part 2 *Annam, Laos, Cambodia, Tongking, Cochin China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 3 *Southern and Eastern China.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Asia Part 4 *Western China, Burma, Tibet.*—CAPT. BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 5** *Northern China and Mongolia.*—GEORGE W. TWOMEY, M. D., U. S. Veteran's Hospital, Fort Snelling, Minn., and DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

★**Asia Part 6** *Japan.*—SIDNEY HERSCHEL SMALL, San Rafael, Calif., and OSCAR E. RILEY, 4 Huntington Ave., Scardsdale, New York.

Asia Part 7 *Persia, Arabia.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Asia Minor.—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 1 *Egypt.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

✠**Africa Part 2** *Sudan.* W. T. MOFFAT, Opera House, Southport, Lancashire, England.

Africa Part 3 *Tripoli. Including the Sahara, Tuaregs, caravan trade and caravan routes.*—CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 4 *Tunis and Algeria.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 5 *Morocco.*—GEORGE E. HOLT, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 6 *Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria.*—W. C. COLLINS, care *Adventure.*

Africa Part 7 *Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal, Zululand, Transvaal and Rhodesia.*—CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, Adventure Camp, Box 107, Santa Susana, Cal.

✠**Africa Part 8** *Portuguese East.*—R. G. WARING, 14837 Grand River Ave., Detroit, Michigan.

South America Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile.*—EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure.*

South America Part 2 *Venezuela, the Guianas, Uraguay, Paraguay, Argentine and Brazil.*—PAUL VANORDEN SHAW, 457 W. 123rd St., New York, N. Y.

West Indies *Cuba, Isle of Pines, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

Central America *Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala.*—CHARLES BELL EMERSON, Adventure Cabin, Orlando, Florida.

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Mexico Part 2 *Southern, Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan.*—C. R. MAHAFFEY, Coyocutena Farm College, La Libertad, Comayagua, Honduras.

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